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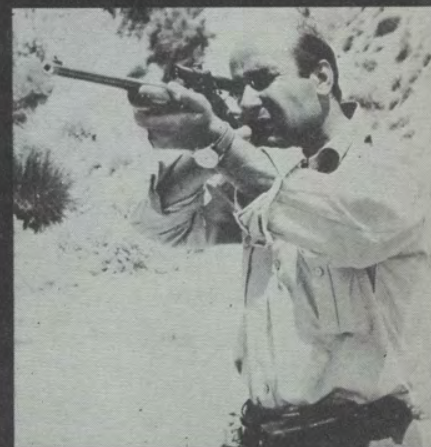
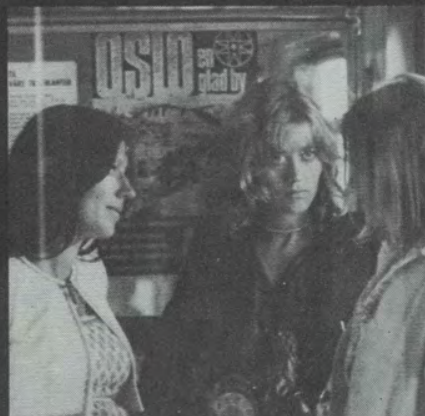


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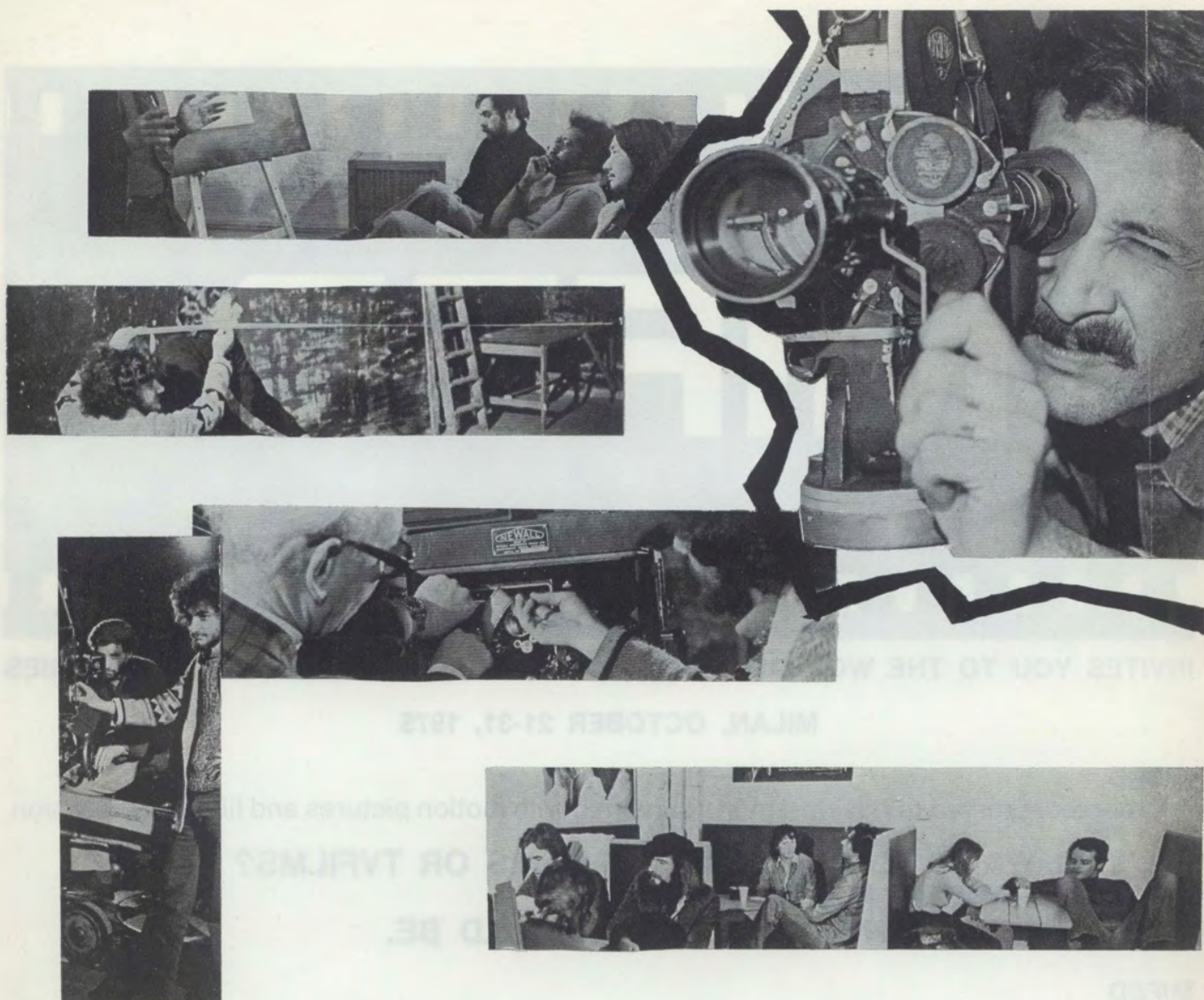
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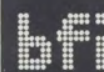
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The London Film Festival is open to the general public and tickets are available at the National Film Theatre from 7th November. Members of the British Film Institute receive advance notification of the Festival programme and can send in their postal bookings at the beginning of November. Full details about both membership and the Festival are available from the Box Office, National Film Theatre, South Bank, Waterloo, London SE1 (Tel 01-928 3232/3) or from the Membership Department, British Film Institute, 81 Dean Street, London, W1Y 6AA (Tel 01-437 4355).



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# SIGHT AND SOUND

AUTUMN 1975

Volume 44 No. 4

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*On the cover: Lily Tomlin in Altman's 'Nashville'*

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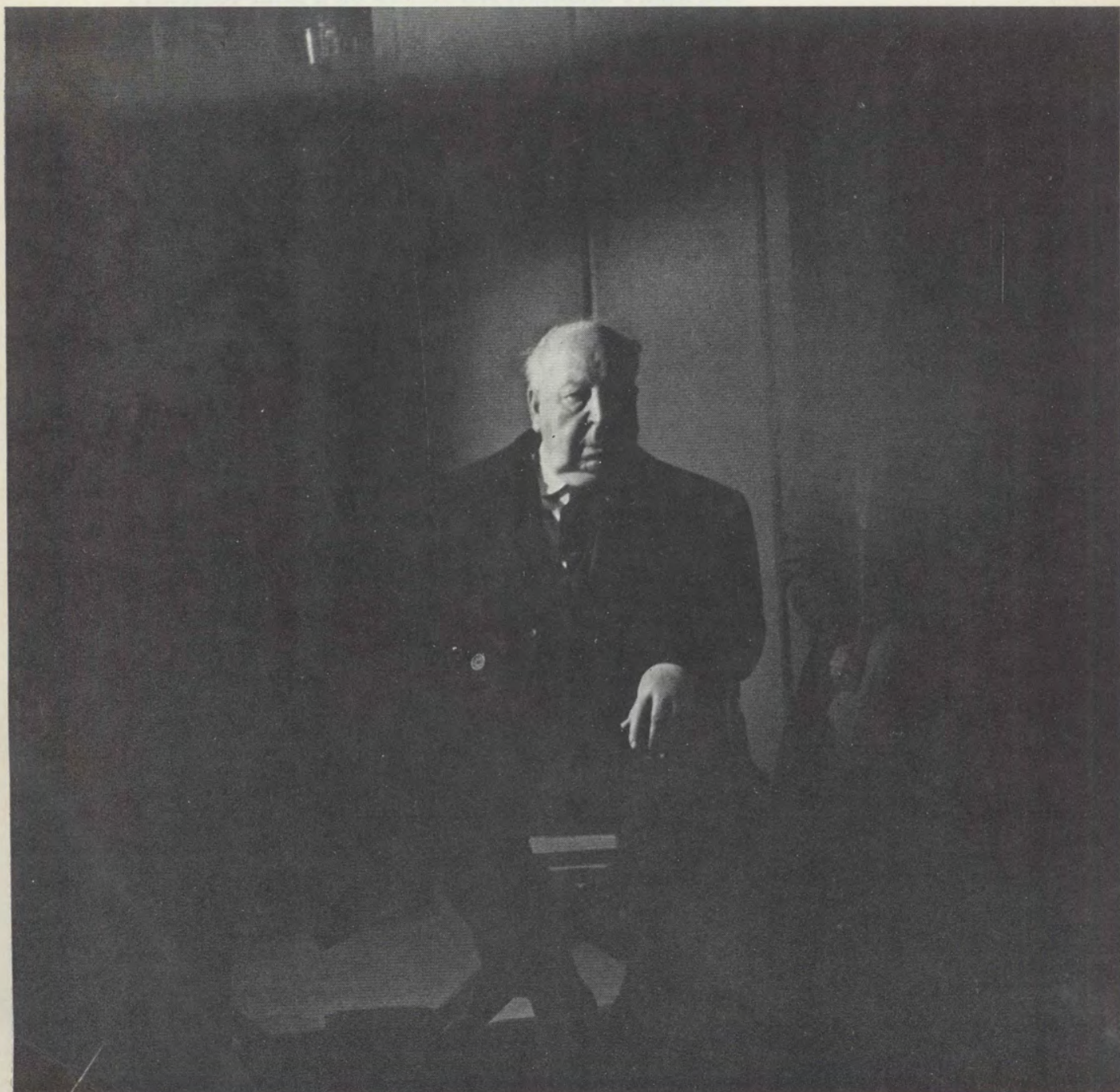
# HITCHCOCK'S

# 53<sup>RD</sup>

John Russell Taylor

I cannot now remember exactly when I first heard that Alfred Hitchcock was preparing a new film. But it must I think have been towards the end of 1973. I was having lunch with him in his office-bungalow up at Universal, and he mentioned that he had spent the morning working on the script of this next, as yet unnamed, project. It was based, he said, on a Victor Canning novel called *The Rainbird Pattern* ('but we certainly shan't call it that'), published a year or so before. I confessed ignorance, even though the book had apparently received excellent reviews, and been a good, if not a best, seller. Well, he said, we're really not keeping that much of the book—as usual, it's the idea and a few possibilities that we pick out of it. And so he began to describe what the book and/or film was about.

What he proceeded to tell me seemed to me complicated but quite comprehensible. I stress this because I know from people who have encountered Hitchcock during the preparatory stages of a film that he tends to use anyone and everyone as a sort of preview audience, employing his famous skills as a raconteur to construct the film for them in their mind's eye and observe their reactions as some guide to how this or that will play. I gather that in the case of 'Alfred Hitchcock's





53rd Film', as it was cryptically known right up to the start of shooting, he got quite a lot of puzzled or downright unfavourable responses early on—one famous producer told me that when Hitchcock told him the story he could not make head or tail of it, and frankly told him so. Be that as it may, the story seemed to me clear enough: there were these two separate plots involving two separate groups of characters whose paths kept crossing; a fake medium and her taxi-driver boy friend who helped document her clients for her, who were set on the trail of an heir who had vanished in childhood; and a master criminal kidnapper who is simultaneously, with the help of his girl friend, pulling off a series of spectacularly successful jobs, strictly for the ransom money.

Finally, you discover that the connection between these two strands is that the master criminal is the long-lost heir; hence the irony of the investigators getting nearer and nearer to him for quite the wrong reasons, or at any rate for reasons quite different from what he supposes when he gradually becomes aware of their presence. The scene in which his suspicions crystallise into a certainty was the only one Hitchcock specifically described at this stage, in great detail and with obvious enjoyment. It is the kidnapping of the Bishop of San Francisco in Grace Cathedral in the middle of Mass. The kidnappers drug him and drag him off before the eyes of the congregation, depending of course on the slightly embarrassed sense of decorum which possesses those in church and makes them hesitate to act in what would otherwise be a natural fashion, for fear that it will seem out of place or irreverent, to give the necessary time to make a getaway. All goes according to plan, except that 'that man' is there again—the taxi-driver, who as it happens is there for quite a different reason, trying to make an appointment to see the bishop, who, it transpires, was the parish priest thirty years before in the village where the heir was last seen.

We know Hitchcock's propensity for being turned on by particular scenes or visual ideas for his films, and working outwards from these until the threads join up into as coherent as possible a story line. It nearly drove Raymond Chandler crazy when he was working on *Strangers on a Train*, since what Hitchcock required of him was to forge the links between situation A and situation B in the most convincing and logical-seeming way, while Chandler was worrying fruitlessly about whether, given the characters of the people involved in situation A, they would ever arrive at situation B at all. Hitchcock himself put it succinctly to me some years ago: 'First you decide what the characters are going to do, and then you provide them with enough characteristics to make it seem plausible that they should do it.' So it seemed probable that this scene he so lovingly described should have been the grain of sand in the original book from which he would build up the pearl of his finished film.

What was my surprise, then, to discover that the scene does not exist at all in the book. The book's plot is in outline what Hitchcock had described, but with some important differences. First, it takes place in England, and a very quiet rural England



Hitchcock with his secretary

at that, setting up a (very Hitchcockian, one would say) dislocation between the crimes going on and the mild, well-mannered circumstances in which they occur. Then, the characterisation is more extreme and peculiar than he described it: the medium is a largely genuine medium, though not above reinforcing her psychic powers with a little help from her friend; the kidnapper is actually a homicidal maniac (rather than there being some faint hint that he may have been responsible for the fire in which his foster-parents died and he managed to disappear at the age of twelve), and though his crimes catch up with him he has a son, probably just as crazed, who will inherit the money instead and unleash heaven knows what on the world in his turn. And thirdly, there is no kidnapping of a bishop in the middle of Mass. A bishop is kidnapped, to be sure, but it is in the middle of a solitary country walk which he takes every weekend.

The next time I saw Hitchcock, I asked about these differences. The first one was merely practical: he did not want to make a film in Britain this time, and so had transferred the action right away to San Francisco and round about. Though, he added, he was now wondering about San Francisco, because it was so hackneyed as a location—'I think if I see one more car chase bouncing over those hills I shall scream.' Maybe somewhere on the East Coast instead, but anyway in America. The second he readily agreed to. He did not want this film to be too heavy and serious, so he was reworking the characters in an altogether lighter vein. Anyway, he thought the supernatural was always difficult to accommodate in a story that was not centred on it, since it tended to remove the characters concerned from normal human sympathies and make them too special.

As for the homicidal maniac: 'People always think villains are extraordinary, but in my experience they are usually rather ordinary and boring—certainly less interesting and peculiar than most of the ordinary,

law-abiding people you meet. In this story, the way I see it, the villains are actually rather dull characters, they are the straight men, if you like, their motives are very simple and mundane. Whereas the more ordinary couple are actually very peculiar. And you see, each is moved some way in the direction of the other: the criminals are made to have much more of the ordinary in them, while the good guys have more of the criminal in them. It makes it less melodramatic, lighter and more believable—almost a comedy thriller. I think I'll keep a bit of ambiguity about the kidnapper's background in infant mayhem and the possible genuineness of the psychic's powers, just for fun, but that's all.'

And the kidnapping of the bishop? The book had given him the idea for it, because he had always been fascinated by the special attitudes of people under some kind of social constraint, such as being part of a church congregation, and had wanted to stage a crime in the middle of a church service just to work out the possibilities of the situation. The kidnapping of a bishop seemed like the perfect opportunity, but what would be the point of doing it as it was done in the book? 'Kidnap him in ordinary clothes alone in a wood and he might as well be a stockbroker. If you are going to kidnap a bishop, you want to do it at the moment when he is most evidently being a bishop—in the middle of Mass, in front of a crowded congregation.'

At this time Hitchcock was already working every day with Ernest Lehman on the script, and he showed me the actual physical script they were working on. It was a large book of double foolscap size, each page having on the lefthand side Lehman's first full draft and on the right, typed up and then further annotated by hand, Hitchcock's comments and glosses—often far more copious than the script itself. The comments varied from a brief query on the wording of a line of dialogue to very



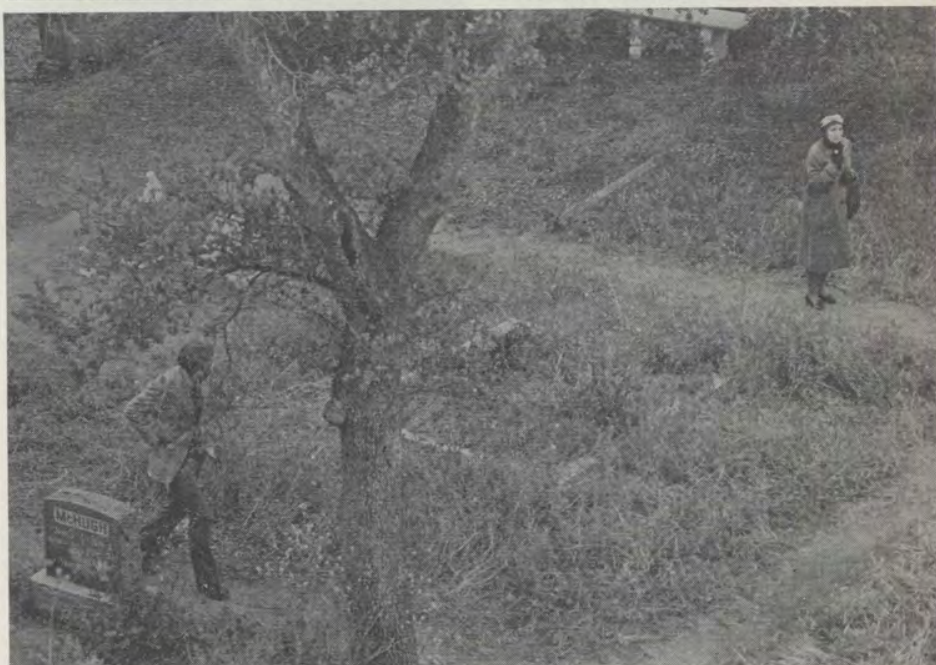
elaborately thought out arguments about the dramatic logic of a particular turn of events; all of them a basis for discussion rather than an instruction to change. And discussion was what was going on: each morning, regular as clockwork, Lehman came to the studio and they would talk over as much as they could get through before lunch, maybe only a line or two sometimes, sitting comfortably side by side on a large sofa with the script between them. Then Lehman would go off to make the modifications they had agreed on and come back the next day for more. (When I asked excitedly if he had scripts like this for his other films, Hitchcock said no, he had only just thought of this layout.)

Why Ernest Lehman? Because, obviously, they had got along very well on *North by Northwest*, and also because Lehman was readily available at this time. 'There's the illogicality of this town for you. He's a first-rate professional scriptwriter—nobody would doubt that. But nobody wants to employ him because his last two films were flops. Even if you blame him completely for that (which is difficult), you should also say that probably his mistake was producing *Hello Dolly!* and directing *Portnoy's Complaint*. That would not affect in any way his known abilities as a writer, with some of the biggest box-office successes ever under his belt. But here it's so much superstition rather than sense.'

I wondered whether the routine of working with Hitchcock had changed at all in the fifteen years since *North by Northwest*. I remembered Hitchcock had said afterwards that originally he thought of *North by Northwest* as much more abrupt and disjointed, like an early Nevinson painting, all jagged, angular shapes; then had felt he had to fill in the gaps to make it smoother-flowing, so as not to distress a modern public used to having everything spoon-fed them. Perhaps changing times, changing assumptions about plotting based on television conventions, would have loosened things up a bit? But Ernest Lehman says that if anything Hitchcock is now even more tight and meticulous in his script preparation—at that time he wanted things worked out sufficiently to give him a reliable working basis, but now he wants all the cracks to be neatly and convincingly papered over and everything set in script terms and dramatic logic (or the appearance of it) before he sets foot on a sound stage.

So the preparation went on, and already by late spring of 1974 they had begun to hire the crew, though starting dates were vague—this autumn, the New Year, next spring... And no casting definite, though Hitchcock went through an intensive series of screenings of films currently around the studio (Universal, of course) and always, as he said, with his own requirements clearly in view, to look over the work of a possible actor or technician. I once encountered him quite mystified about Goldie Hawn after seeing *Steelyard Blues*, and wondered for a wild moment if someone had suggested she might be suitable casting, you know, a cool blonde with a sizzle of sexuality underneath.

*Pursuit in a cemetery, with the taxi-driver and the widow moving to and fro across the grid, 'like an animated Mondrian'*





The script completed, more or less, Hitchcock started work with his sketch artist, Tom Wright, who had worked on one or two other Hitchcock films in this capacity, including I believe *Psycho*, and who was this time to be second-unit director as well. I was out of the country at the start of this stage of the preparation, and by the time I got back Hitchcock himself had got into a succession of health problems which involved him being in and out of hospital for most of the autumn—they included the fitting of a heart pacemaker, which he delights to show and describe the surgical processes in gruesome detail.

By December 1974, when I saw him again, the production was moving towards its final stages of preparedness. The script was pretty well fixed, for the moment (the final pre-production script bears evidence of some intensive final polishing around the end of March and beginning of April 1975, but it is nearly all matters of detail), and instead Hitchcock was concentrating on laying out the action sequences with Tom Wright. This applied particularly to the car chase sequence in the picture, which presumably the second unit would do anyway, but which was clearly going to be done exactly as Hitchcock designed it. The whole film is set out shot by shot in a sort of storyboard form, keyed into the final shooting script, so that by the time Hitchcock goes on to the floor he, and everyone else relevant in the unit, knows exactly what he wants to shoot and how he wants to shoot it, and can refer to this storyboard in case of doubt. Hitchcock likes to maintain, perversely, that once he has prepared a film in this way and cast it, anyone could shoot the same film. One may take leave to doubt him, seeing how much extra moment-to-moment explanation and decision-making is necessary with even the most detailed script of this kind, which in the last analysis can only be an aide-mémoire for the director, the one man who knows completely what this shorthand means.

The car chase is not exactly a car chase, not for most of its length, but a prolonged cat and mouse game in which the psychic and her boy friend, lured on a wild goose chase to a rendezvous on top of a mountain, find the brake fluid drained from their car as it careers wildly down out of control. Then, escaping with their lives, they are pursued by the would-be killer in his car until he gets killed himself in a car wreck. One day when I saw him, Hitchcock had spent the morning laying this out, and was talking with great enthusiasm about the necessity of re-examining conventional situations to make quite sure if the conventional way of shooting them is in fact the best. Sometimes of course it is, the only sensible way. But sometimes, as in this case, if you start to ask questions you do not get very sensible answers.

Why, for instance, must you always see the edge of the windscreen and the top of the bonnet in a driver's eye view shot of the road, especially in a car speeding towards or away from something or out of control? No reason at all, says Hitchcock. In fact, it is flouting an important psychological truth, that though of course they are physically there in the driver's field of vision, he will only see—and therefore we, for full identi-

fication, should also only see—what is important to him: the road rushing vertiginously to meet him, the landscape flying past on either side. So Hitchcock had been designing the sequence accordingly, shot by shot, with the illustrator sketching under his direction, taking visual notes, then going away and drawing up the individual shot compositions and coming back to discuss further and where necessary modify—exactly as, at an earlier stage, the scriptwriter had worked.

How far is the film thus arrived at in words and drawn images transferred exactly to the screen? The answer, as one might suppose, is closely but not slavishly. Though the 'storyboard' is kept on set, I never saw Hitchcock himself refer to it during the shooting—obviously he does not need to, it is primarily a stage in his thinking about a film, or thinking it out, and once that is done it is hardly needed. Even the locations are selected at an early stage in the script preparation and their characteristics embodied in the script, rather than leaving anything to last minute inspiration.

For example, there is a sequence in the middle of the film in which the taxi-driver makes contact with the widow of the man who tried to kill him, at the latter's funeral. Recognising him (in a shot in which everything is right out of focus except the man himself, glimpsed in the distance beyond the funeral party at the graveside), she tries to escape, and he pursues her. As Hitchcock says, there is an obvious conventional way of doing this: shot of back of retreating woman; shot of front of advancing man, gaining on her; close-up of her breaking into a run, panicked; close-up of him looking determined, gaining on her, and so on. And as usual, because that is the way it is conventionally done, Hitchcock wanted, if it was reasonably possible, to do it differently. Looking at the cemetery they had chosen as a location (in Glendale, quite close to the studio), he was struck by its curious irregular, rather overgrown grid-pattern, and at once had the idea of shooting the pursuit from above—a high platform built for the purpose—in one shot, with the two characters moving across the grid to and fro in rough parallel, like 'an animated Mondrian'. But all this was worked out in detail months before shooting started, whereas another director might well select the location which would give him the idea at the last moment.

Clearly the idea of situating the story very specifically in and around San Francisco had been abandoned quite early on, and the decision taken to make the film mostly in and near the studio. But the image of Grace Cathedral remained for the bishop's kidnapping, and with it some other unobtrusively San Francisco locations for the houses of various characters. At one time Hitchcock even contemplated doing the cathedral sequence in the studio, on the principle that all he really needed was one column and the rest could be matted in. But he discovered that in the studio the sequence would cost 200,000 dollars, so decided he might as well go on location, and while he was there shoot himself the other San Francisco exteriors, which had formerly been assigned to the second unit.

By this time, then, the only things left imponderable were the casting and the title. On April 22 the title was settled as *Deceit*, and most of the casting was done, with Bruce Dern as Lumley, the taxi-driver, Barbara Harris as Blanche, the psychic, Roy Thinnes as Adamson, the kidnapper, Karen Black as Fran, his girl friend, and, just before production started, Cathleen Nesbitt as Julia Rainbird, the old lady who sets the whole thing off.

It is, I think, a fair indication of the small importance Hitchcock attaches to performers among the various elements in a film that casting was left so late, until everything else had been settled; no consideration was given to making the characters conform to the known personalities and capabilities of the actors envisaged; rather, the roles were left as strictly circumscribed slots into which the actors would eventually be fitted. The only really known quantity among them, in that he had worked with Hitchcock before on *Marnie* (very briefly) and some television, was Bruce Dern, though Cathleen Nesbitt would of course be very familiar to him from his days of constant attendance in the London theatre. Roy Thinnes was working just next door on Robert Wise's *Hindenburg*; Barbara Harris he got, I suppose, from *Nashville*, since he had never seen her in the theatre and was amused to discover that in one of her biggest stage successes, *On a Clear Day*, she had also played a psychic; and Karen Black he got from I don't know what, certainly not *Day of the Locust*, which he had not seen, though following its box-office career with interest.

In any case, he clearly regarded the two kidnappers as the less interesting roles, and spoke with more enthusiasm about Bruce Dern and Barbara Harris, finding in them both just the characteristic of built-in personal oddity which would give density and individuality to their characters as written in broad outline. In other words, he was still following his old adage that the most important part of directing actors is casting them right, so that you can rely on them to take on naturally the required shape without constant instruction. Indeed, the only actor I saw him do much apparent direction of was Karen Black, and then evidently not because he felt it was necessary, but because she seemed to want reassurance that the master was satisfied.

Shooting was due to start on May 5, but at the last moment it was delayed till May 12 to accommodate further costume and make-up tests. Even this time was not lost, though. One of the few patches in the script which was not laid out in full detail was the opening scene, a long dialogue between Blanche and Miss Rainbird in which the plot foundations are laid during a séance. The indications as to how precisely this would be shot remained sketchy. Since the tests required were for Cathleen Nesbitt and Barbara Harris, Hitchcock directed them himself, using the chance to rehearse the first scene in various ways so that by the time shooting started he was just as detailed in his conception of it as he was for the rest of the film.

Watching Hitchcock at work on set is an education in precision and in economy.



Everything is quiet, very polite, very ordered. He himself wears his regulation dark suit, white shirt and dark tie, and though he does not insist on senior members of the unit doing likewise, they obviously soon get the message that a degree of formality somehow creates an atmosphere of purposefulness and concentration on the business in hand. Hitchcock sits quietly and expresses the absolute minimum, which, for a nervous or insecure actor, could be alarming. He communicates mainly with the director of photography (Leonard J. South, a senior man who has photographed few features on his own, but was for years operator for the late Robert Burks and is used to Hitchcock's technique), his first assistant and his script-girl. He intervenes directly only when something does not go according to plan, and practically everything is done on first or at most second take. When I comment on the oddity of this in current Hollywood practice, he says briskly, 'If you know what you want, and you know when you've got it, why do more?'

One afternoon, right after the press lunch he has staged in a mock-up graveyard, a nonsense occasion no doubt devised to compensate the Hollywood press for the fact that the set itself is firmly closed, as well as to support Hitchcock's public image as a macabre joker, I watch him polish off a whole sequence on two adjacent sets in about two and a half hours. Fran, heavily disguised (as Marnie, more or less), is bringing back the ransom for their latest kidnap victim in a police helicopter which she wordlessly directs to a secret rendezvous on a golf course. We see her look around from inside the just-landed helicopter, then get out and head off into the woods. We see the pilot get out and look after her, registering reactions to a flashing light and then to the sound of a car driving away. In the next scene, in the wood, we see Adamson standing with a body slumped at his feet; Fran comes up to him, hands over a little bag; he opens it and drops the diamond (for that is what the ransom is) into the palm of his hand, then examines it with a jeweller's glass while we zoom into close-up: diamond, glass, eye. Then, satisfied, they turn and head off through the dark wood, all without a word of dialogue.

The whole of one sequence, in fact, except for a cut-in shot of a guide light flashing in the wood to go in the middle of the first shot of Karen Black. ('Will there be enough time for it?' asks the cameraman of the way Hitchcock has staged the shot. 'Oh yes,' says Hitchcock. 'We don't need to leave time for it. A couple of frames will be more than enough to insert the cutaway.') The helicopter is a mock-up of the front half, placed against an incredibly tiny black screen; the wood is pocket-sized, like something out of *The 39 Steps*. When the pilot gets out of the helicopter on the far side from the camera and walks round the front of it, there is only about six inches of the screen to spare behind him. But it is enough—as far as the audience is concerned, says Hitchcock. What they can't see doesn't exist for them; six inches is as good as six miles for all the difference it makes. The wood too is just a few tree shapes looming out of the darkness, so what point would there be in having any more on the stage than just that?

The woodland scene is as clearly laid out in the script as the rest, but here Hitchcock has to explain a little further to his camera crew. 'What are we selling in this shot? That there is a body there, and that he's not dead. That's all we want to show, but it has to be absolutely clear.' The shots envisaged in the script are done just as planned, up to the zoom into a tight close-up, and then Hitchcock decides to add a shot of Adamson and Fran turning and walking off into the shadows; in the script this is covered by the pilot's reaction shot. The shot is set up instantly and done in one take, which wraps up shooting for that day, an hour or so ahead of schedule. The film is scheduled to take 58 days to shoot and in the third week they are already a day or two ahead of themselves. The budget envisaged is a modest 3½ million



Karen Black, in heavy disguise, as the kidnapper's accomplice

dollars, and of that, Hitchcock wryly remarks, 550,000 dollars goes in fringe benefits of various kinds that never show on the screen.

The following week, in San Francisco, things are rather different. On location in Grace Cathedral the same cloistered conditions can hardly apply. The shooting mostly takes place in one corner, but it is not possible, or perhaps no one has wanted, to rope it all off. People can wander in and out as they wish provided they stay out of camera range, though since as yet no one seems to know that Hitchcock is shooting there we have few purposeful visitors. Also, there are more relatively unruly elements, in the shape of a couple of hundred extras in the congregation as well as the cathedral choir. The extras, as is the way with extras, want to act, to make the most of their few seconds' screen time with elaborate reactions, and dare to attempt discussion of motivation with the master. But if he was not going to take that from Paul Newman he is certainly not going to take it from extras. At one point, when the abduction of the bishop is actually taking place, some extras at the back ask him to describe what is happening so that they will know how to react. 'Can you see

what's happening?' No. 'Then there you are. You can't see what's happening, you don't know what's happening, you just have the vague idea that something is.' Later, he has to be sharp with someone chattering in the front row instead of attending to the action—'Now, let's try to pay some attention to the movement of the picture.' When the shot is in the can he walks away, shakes his head, grins and says, 'That's what you would call directing idiots.'

The abduction itself is shown—again exactly as broken down in the script—by not being shown. Fran, heavily disguised as an old lady, hobbles forward and appears to fall at the bishop's feet; he leans over her; Adamson dressed as a verger hurries forward to help, and the rest is done in a series of instantaneous flashes: Adamson's hand with a hypodermic, close-up of the bishop's face as he passes out, close-up of Fran's head passing the camera as she leaps up, close-ups of Fran's and Adamson's hands going under the bishop's arms as they prepare to haul him away, a couple of reaction shots from choir and congregation, a shot of Fran and Adamson dragging the bishop to his feet, more reaction shots, and a brief flash of the kidnappers vanishing through the side door. Perfect silent technique, in fact, built on a very fast montage of detached, in themselves almost static shots. In the event Hitchcock simplifies the script version still further: the shots of the hands going under the bishop's arms are eliminated, and so, particularly, is that from the congregation's point of view of the two of them pulling the bishop to his feet. The less shown, the better, says Hitchcock: the effect we want to create is that this is something happening in a flash, before anyone present knows what if anything is going on.

He does decide to add a couple of shots, though: one of the needle going into the bishop's heavily robed arm (and he explains to the props men exactly where it has to go on the dummy—'You have to know a bit of everything in this business—otherwise dozens of doctors will write in complaining') and one of Karen Black's feet scrabbling on the floor as she gets up, a little detail which catches his attention and amuses him while actually shooting. Again, everything is neat, tidy, incredibly swift and under control. The point of view from which every decision is taken on the set is, as with all decisions taken at the earlier stages of preparation, that of what the audience has to see, where the audience's attention must be directed and what we can rely on their not seeing because we do not want them to and do not let them.

Since I left California there have been further changes. The title is, as of the beginning of July, *Family Plot*. And Roy Thinnes has departed the picture rather precipitately, entailing, I suppose, a certain amount of reshooting. The official announcement was vague—something about a change in the character concept requiring a change of casting. *Variety* said he was fired after differences of opinion, and elsewhere Hitchcock was quoted as saying, 'When I'm directing a film, I'm directing a film, not some actor.' Of that there could never in the last fifty years have been the slightest room for doubt. ■



# CAVALCANTI



'Coal Face'

## in England

Elizabeth Sussex

Alberto de Almeida Cavalcanti, a Brazilian who first made his mark in films with the French *avant-garde* in the 1920s, spent sixteen of his most creative years in England. He was a key figure first in John Grierson's GPO Film Unit and then in Michael Balcon's Ealing Films—the only two movements that have pioneered styles of film-making indigenous to Britain. What exactly was Cavalcanti's contribution to both these set-ups and consequently to British cinema, and has it been sufficiently recognised?

In recent years, evidence has emerged of a strong division of opinion between Grierson and Cavalcanti, but its true nature is still concealed behind what are represented as rather petty squabbles about things like credits. Was Cavalcanti's light being deliberately hidden under a bushel from the time he began to break new ground at the GPO and his name was allegedly omitted from the credit titles of his key experiment *Coal Face*? Did he make the contribution that really put British documentary on the map? Is he perhaps the most underestimated figure in British film history?

This article, which is an attempt at reassessment, is based on recent conversations with Cavalcanti in his Paris flat and with Sir Michael Balcon at his home in Sussex. It also draws on the mass of interview material with Grierson and other members of his movement, collected for my book *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*.\*

'I don't know very well how you can explain,' said Cavalcanti. (He sat surrounded by surrealist objects both sacred and profane. Above his head hung a huge portrait of his mother. The family resemblance was striking.) 'I don't want to appear a nasty old man, and I don't want to appear as a man who is taking advantage, but I am puzzled and astonished by certain events that I learned in succession from time to time including this last winter, that made me sort of wonder and find that the disagreement was much deeper than I thought—because as a matter of fact, being out of work, I wrote to Grierson in great innocence, which I wouldn't have done, to ask for a job when he was in TV in Scotland.'

It seems that Cavalcanti, who has been lecturing at the Film Study Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, over the last few years (at seventy-nine he says he cannot afford to retire), was told 'partly by people

\*University of California Press, 1975.



from Chicago and mostly people in Canada that Grierson had a very strange behaviour towards me when he left the GPO. It had started in London when he was at Film Centre but I never paid any attention to it and never thought it was important. Knowing what happened when he went to Canada, I realised it was—that he had a kind of bitter attitude, for instance films I had to do with were forbidden to the Canadian Film Board boys... All the films that I made at the GPO were forbidden, and that was very peculiar.'

It appears to be true that Grierson banned screenings of early British documentaries to his Canadian team, and although his reasons for this are hard to comprehend they may have had nothing to do with Cavalcanti. All this was a very long time ago. When I met Grierson only a few years back he was full of enthusiasm about the early days and gave no indication of animosity towards Cavalcanti.

But Cavalcanti has also been upset by things like the discovery that his name is not included in the entry on British documentary in the Bordas *L'Encyclopédie du Cinéma*—'It quotes all the names of everybody of the Grierson crowd and doesn't quote mine. I could very easily go to them and say "Who is the person who gave you this information?" I think I have the right to do that, but I just did not care and said, "Oh well, to hell with it. What I did, I did..."'

The recurrent argument about credits is a very considerable puzzle.

'Everybody knows that the credits in the GPO film unit were full of fantasy, and of Grierson fantasy,' says Cavalcanti, and Grierson himself said that he was quite sure some of them were still 'totally wrong'.

'The selflessness of some of the documentary people was a very remarkable thing,' said Grierson. 'They didn't put their names on pictures. People finally had to try to discover where the credits lay, and the poor old Film Institute has never quite discovered how the credits of documentary lie even today, because we kept on putting on the names of the young people, not the

names of the people who were concerned. There were years when Cavalcanti's name never went on a picture. We weren't concerned with that aspect of things, with credits. It was only latterly that credits became important to the documentary people.'

What credits in particular are wrong?

'My name is not on *Coal Face*,' says Cavalcanti. 'I cut the film completely myself, the whole conception of the sound. It was library film. Harry shot one sequence, and Jennings shot one sequence. We used some of the old Flaherty tests... I faked—I did lots of shooting in the studios to be able to cut the Flaherty material in, and I wasn't given a credit. I didn't complain. After all, it was a small film. It was an experiment for *Night Mail*. On *Night Mail* I have the Auden and Britten title for "sound direction", which doesn't exist as a credit. Well I did much more than that because the whole cutting, the conception of the whole thing, is the result of *Coal Face*. But I didn't care about that at all. I had no credits for half of the stuff I did, so it's funny to accuse me of wanting credits. If I had insisted on being given what I made I would have many more, I assure you.'

'In afterthought,' wrote Paul Rotha in his recent *Documentary Diary* (where incidentally he implies that Cavalcanti had been complaining for many years that his name had been suppressed by Grierson from credit titles and publicity on GPO films), 'I think Grierson had a valid point in this one-sided argument when he recalled that Cavalcanti had asked for his name to be left off such films as *Coal Face*, *Granton Trawler* and *Night Mail* when they were made because he felt that association with such *avant-garde* work might jeopardise his chances of employment in British feature film production at that time.' When did Grierson have this recollection? According to Rotha's footnote, it was during an interview with him at Devizes on 17 June 1970.

The idea that he wanted his name left off for this reason infuriates Cavalcanti even more than the idea that he wanted it

on: 'I wasn't named three-quarters of the time, and then they say I was trying to grab a position in the fiction industry. I stayed for seven years at a wage of misery—I had to begin with £7 a week—because I was tired of fictional films in France. I was doing them, and I was very successful with the comedies I was doing, and I didn't want to go on. I wanted to experiment in sound.'

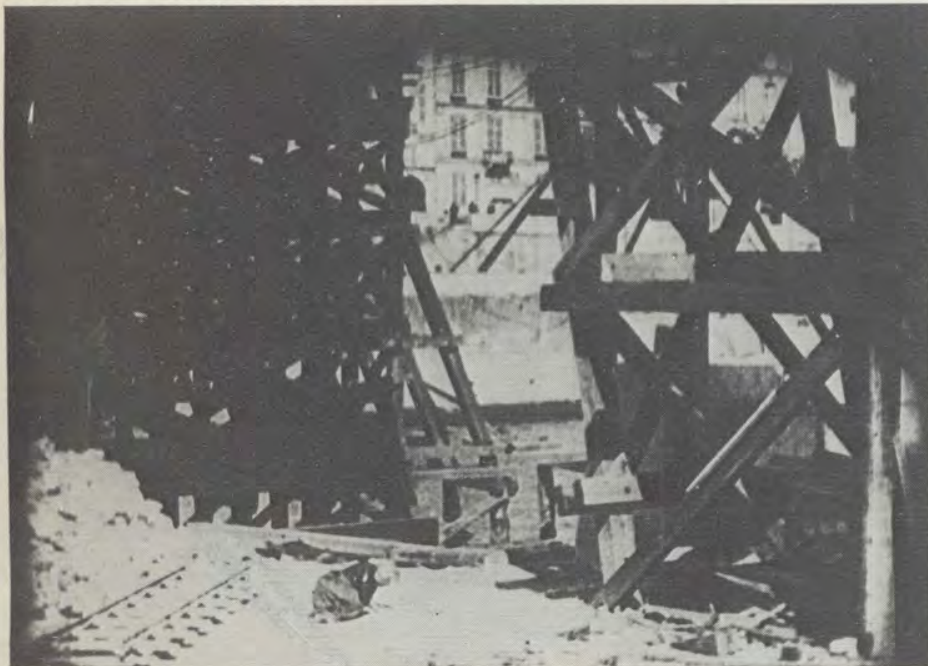
It is certainly very easy to find evidence which suggests that Cavalcanti's primarily aesthetic contribution to British documentary has always been a little underplayed by comparison with that of the social propagandists who took their lead directly from Grierson. Yet Cavalcanti's contribution is acknowledged to have been a large one. To understand it properly, I think we have to go back to the beginning, which for Cavalcanti was earlier than it was for most of the others. In the 1930s, in fact, all the documentary people were rather differently placed in relation to each other from the way they are now.

When Cavalcanti came to England to join the GPO film unit in 1934, he was thirty-seven years old and had a whole career behind him. Born in Brazil, he seems to have been a lot brainier and at least a little more argumentative than average from the beginning. He began law studies at the age of fifteen and remembers being the youngest student in the university, but he was 'expelled because of a quarrel with an old professor.' His father sent him to Geneva on condition that he steer clear of both law and politics, and he trained as an architect. At eighteen he was working in an architect's atelier in Paris. From there he switched to interior decoration and then to the art department of the film studios. He did set designs from 1922 for Marcel L'Herbier, Louis Delluc and others, and he became a member of the *avant-garde*, which he describes as a movement of inward as well as outward dissent and strife.

'We hated ourselves... We couldn't bear any of the others. We had one thing in common and one only—we were in disagreement with our masters' art, the art of the people we were working for. I thought L'Herbier didn't face films to try to make them speak their own language. He tried to make films speak literature, and all our masters used films as kind of novels or plays. They weren't concerned in finding a language for films. We all had that in common: we thought there was a language, and that it must be searched for, it must be found.'

In retrospect Cavalcanti sees something constructive not just in the search but in the whole atmosphere of mutual criticism: 'I don't know if that hatred among ourselves was not a good thing. I think it was. And we had a trump card in our hands. We were friendly with all the great artists of our time in Paris—all the painters, sculptors, writers. They liked us and they helped us. Now if you compare what they call the *nouvelle vague* with that, the *nouvelle vague* is totally different... They don't detest each other at all. They love each other. They praise each other. They push each other. All that should improve on us, on the generation before, but it doesn't because

'Rien que les heures' (1926): 'a social document... about the lives in miserable places'





they know nobody among the painters, the people in the other arts. They are completely self-centred in films, film magazines etc. That is the true difference. When I came to England I was surprised by how much film people there were sort of tied together.'

Cavalcanti came to England after several years in which, due to the arrival of synchronised sound, no *avant-garde* work had been possible. He had even had a period of exile from the studios 'because the French like the Americans thought the silent film directors couldn't do sound pictures,' but he came back to make French and Portuguese versions of American films for Paramount. These were followed by a series of French comedies of his own which he claims were 'terrifically successful commercially' but 'very primitive' in their use of sound. 'I had learned sound the hard way,' he says, 'the know-how to record dialogue, but I thought dialogue was one small part of sound and not the sound film.' The moment Grierson's unit got its own recording equipment, he broke a contract to come over to England.

Grierson was happy. 'My boys don't know anything about sound,' he said, inviting him by all means to amuse himself for a while at the unit's newly acquired studio in Blackheath. Grierson's boys knew about Cavalcanti, of course. He was one of the names that had impressed them at Film Society screenings. Grierson was lucky or, perhaps more accurately, knew how to use his luck. First Flaherty, now Cavalcanti. Apart from any other considerations, the reputation of the fledgling school of British documentary was obviously much enhanced by its ability to attract international names like these.

Cavalcanti settled in contentedly: 'I was so happy I stayed seven years there, and I think the result was very good. But the atmosphere in Blackheath was wonderful, you know...' With the exception of Grierson, who worked mainly from the unit's offices at 21 Soho Square, Cavalcanti found himself 'the only sort of middle-aged person there.' Budding directors like Harry Watt and Basil Wright and Humphrey Jennings, then still in their twenties, naturally looked up to him as a film-maker of stature as well as someone with all the technical knowledge they still lacked.

'I was enormously grateful to him and always shall be, apart from his friendship which I managed to obtain, for all the things he did on films I was working on like *Song of Ceylon* and *Night Mail*. His ideas about the use of sound were so liberating that they would liberate in you about a thousand other ideas,' says Basil Wright. He remembers having both Grierson and Cavalcanti in the same set-up as 'absolutely magical... worth a million pounds to any young man to be there.' Harry Watt goes further. 'I believe fundamentally that the arrival of Cavalcanti in the GPO film unit was the turning point of British documentary,' he says. 'If I've had any success in films I put it down to my training from Cavalcanti, and I think a lot of other people should say the same thing.'

Grierson's relationship with Cavalcanti was always a little different. 'He only came to the studios to upset my work,' Cavalcanti



'Pett and Pott' (1934): fantasy for the GPO

claims now. 'He used to shift everybody all the time, which upset me a lot... Indeed everybody knew this well in Blackheath.' People knew it and, like Cavalcanti himself perhaps, chose mostly to make a joke of it?

'It must have been very difficult for Grierson when we technicians more and more turned to Cavalcanti with our problems,' wrote Watt in his recent autobiography, 'but he (Grierson) was honest and shrewd enough to realise how much more polished and professional our films were becoming under Cav.' In fairness it must be added that Harry Watt was never quite on Grierson's wavelength as far as work was concerned. For some people, Grierson was still the dominant influence. For instance, despite his warm appreciation of Cavalcanti, it is Grierson's artistic contribution to *Song of Ceylon* that Basil Wright has almost total recall of, and indeed describes in every detail with undiminished gratitude to this day.

In any case, arriving as he did at such a crucial moment in the GPO film unit's story, Cavalcanti's influence as a teacher and adviser really goes without saying. More than that, however, the story of Grierson's movement is one from which Cavalcanti, at least in spirit, had never been entirely absent. Himself a pioneer in the making of *avant-garde* films virtually indistinguishable from what Grierson labelled 'documentary', his example was there from the beginning, and indeed the influence on British documentarists of Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (1926), which was shown in London earlier than the famous Film Society programme introducing *Drifters* along with *Battleship Potemkin*, is put on record by the movement's own historian Paul Rotha.

*Rien que les heures*, the first film to attempt to show the ordinary daily life of a city, is well worth a fresh look with the eye of today. A great deal about it helps to illuminate Cavalcanti's career as a whole: the dramatic approach, the social consciousness in contrasting the lives of rich

and poor (not in fact the prerogative of the Grierson school), the surrealism (for as Cavalcanti points out, the French *avant-garde* 'included all the surrealist tendencies of that time'). Its reputation suffered an initial neglect because its thunder was stolen by Ruttmann's *Berlin*, completed later but shown first in Britain and America. In subsequent years, like so much to which the British documentary movement laid special claim, it acquired that aura of potential boredom which comes of being taken too seriously. According to Rotha, for instance, 'Cavalcanti may have failed, at the time, to bring a full social realisation' to his aim which, again according to Rotha, was to show 'Man against the Street, against the turmoil of the City.' The conscious aim seems to have been a little different.

'*Rien que les heures* was an accident,' says Cavalcanti, 'because my first film (*Le Train sans yeux*) was shot in the studios in Germany and the producers didn't pay the bills and the film was held up by the studios, who wouldn't release the negative for copies because they hadn't been paid. So I got a few friends together, and we said, "We must do a film at all costs, because we are going to miss this winter. My film is not coming out. People will think the worst." We made a script, and it was the cheapest film you could imagine. It cost at the time 35,000 old francs, which is nothing at all. We had no studio. We shot everything in the streets, and of course we cut it very quickly and it came out as it was. The idea was that films were always about faraway places, about the sunsets over the Pacific etc., and nobody had an idea that life in the town in which you lived was interesting. That was made clear in *Rien que les heures*... and it immediately came to look like a social document. It is a clumsy social document, but it is a social document about the lack of work, about the lives in miserable places. It had a lot of trouble with the censors, you know.'

*Rien que les heures* is an odd mixture of



images of a Paris not frequented by tourists. A kind of theme suggests itself in the recurrent shots of a lame and wretched woman dragging herself at a snail's pace along alleys and byways, but these shots seem to be presented quite without comment. They are bizarre, incongruous, even comical—especially in juxtaposition with the light Parisian songs that Cavalcanti himself selected to accompany a recent screening at the National Film Theatre. Perhaps it is because these shots, in their sad hopelessness, come so near to provoking laughter that they remain so strongly in the memory. Cavalcanti has been accused of a certain lack of warmth in this film, and a certain lack of feeling in general. I think it is not fully understood that his vision is surrealist rather than realist, and always therefore had the virtue of avoiding sentimentality. Apart from that, it was to be another eight years before British documentary attempted any comparable social document, in the sense of showing conditions during the Depression.

One of Cavalcanti's earliest experiments at the GPO was a fantasy called *Pett and Pott* which cannot be counted among his best work. According to Basil Wright the idea of recording the soundtrack first and putting on the picture afterwards was Grierson's as well as Cavalcanti's; it was a way of getting the unit accustomed to using its newly acquired sound-recording equipment. The idea of making it a grotesque comedy Wright thinks must have been Cavalcanti's, because it stemmed from the kind of films he had been making earlier in France. But Cavalcanti was more successful in the light fantastic vein with *avant-garde* films like, for instance, the charming *La P'tite Lili* (1927) which, he says, was shot in the studios in three days when a patch of grey weather prevented exterior filming on *Yvette*, the big production based on a Maupassant story which he was directing at the time.

'I bought the short ends of the big film. It (*La P'tite Lili*) cost 7,500 francs altogether. We didn't pay the cameraman (Jimmy Rogers) or artists or anybody. When we were looking for a story, Catherine (Hessling) sang the song, and I said "That's it!" The film lasted seven months at Les Ursulines. Two features were changed because people used to come and complain "We want to keep *La P'tite Lili* in the programme but we are bored to see the big film twice." It went into all the cinemas, was sold abroad, was made into a sound film with Milhaud's music, and I never saw a penny. The distributors took it all...'

Well, *Pett and Pott* wasn't at all like that, although it had the benefit of most of the available talent at the GPO film unit. Basil Wright and Stuart Legg were assistant directors; John Taylor photographed it; Humphrey Jennings designed the sets. Perhaps it just went to prove that, like oil and water, frivolity and British documentary don't mix. Certainly Paul Rotha has strayed far from the point when he describes it in *Documentary Diary* as showing 'Cavalcanti's influence at its most mischievous.' This attitude, however, is not unique. John Taylor, for instance, remembers *Pett and Pott* as 'the beginning of the division... I mean, looking back on it, it

was a great mistake to have Cavalcanti really, because he didn't understand what documentary was supposed to be doing.'

Was Cavalcanti in some way undermining Grierson's work? What exactly was the difference of opinion between them? 'The only fundamental difference was that I maintained that "documentary" was a silly denomination,' says Cavalcanti. 'I thought films are the same, either fictional or otherwise, and I thought that films ought to go into cinemas. Grierson little by little started creating the theory that they should be put in a different, what he called non-theatrical circuit, and I thought it was as silly as calling those films documentary. I say, if films are good, they should and could be shown anywhere. There is no reason why they should be destined only for the parsons and for the church halls etc.'

'I had a very serious conversation in the early, rosy days with Grierson about this label "documentary" because I insisted that it should be called, funnily enough (it's only coincidence but it made a fortune in Italy), "neo-realism". The Grierson argument—and I remember it exceedingly well—was just to laugh and say, "You are really a very innocent character. I have to deal with the Government, and the word documentary impresses them as something serious, as something..." I said, "Yes, as something dusty and something annoying." But that was his argument, that documentary was a kind of name that pleased the Government...'

Of course this is much more than an argument about labels. Cavalcanti is attacking the whole basis on which Grierson decreed that documentary should develop. Cavalcanti's whole approach to life is so very different from Grierson's that it is possible he never realised the increasing gravity of his offence.

In 1937 Grierson left the GPO film unit and set up Film Centre in order to extend documentary into a wider field. Sir Stephen Tallents who, as secretary of the Empire Marketing Board and public relations officer at the GPO, had always given him such invaluable support, had left the GPO in 1935 to become controller of public relations in the BBC overseas services and was now an active member of the Imperial Relations Trust set up in 1937 by the Government. It was this Trust which first sent Grierson as film consultant to Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

After Grierson's departure the GPO film unit continued as creatively as ever under Cavalcanti. Humphrey Jennings made *Spare Time* and Harry Watt made *North Sea*—the former being attacked by the Grierson school when it came out, and the latter receiving slightly grudging praise. It was said that Cavalcanti lacked Grierson's ability to deal with the higher civil servants at the Post Office, and certainly there is evidence that Cavalcanti was no political operator. He could inspire creative people whom he approached on a personal basis, but he never really sought power and was never able to make the most of it when he had it. Both Grierson and Cavalcanti were dedicated to their work, but Cavalcanti was the more vulnerable in being, by comparison, politically naive.

When war broke out in 1939, Grierson

had gone to Canada to set up the National Film Board—an exceedingly impressive operation that in itself demonstrates the difference between his kind of ambition and that of the unaggressive Cavalcanti of this world. There seemed to be a situation of considerable confusion at the newly created Ministry of Information, which took over the GPO film unit. According to Harry Watt, there was a longish spell when nothing at all happened because no instructions came through: 'Then Cavalcanti took it upon himself to send us out. This is where Cavalcanti was great. He said, "History is being made. We can't sit here..." All the members of the unit, which included Watt and Jennings, went out and shot everything that looked interesting, and a film was quickly put together. Called *The First Days*, it was quite a promising start to the unit's wartime activities—particularly in the area that would be cultivated by Humphrey Jennings.'

Before Cavalcanti left the GPO film unit, which became the Crown film unit when it was taken over by Ian Dalrymple in 1940, Harry Watt made *Squadron 992* and *Dover Front Line*, Jennings made *Spring Offensive*, Jack Holmes had begun *Merchant Seamen* and ideas for *London Can Take It* and *Target for Tonight* were being discussed. In fact, the unit was fairly well set on the course that it would follow throughout the war.

Why did Cavalcanti leave the GPO film unit and go to Ealing Studios? According to both Cavalcanti and Ian Dalrymple, it was basically because Cavalcanti could not be officially in charge there as a Brazilian. 'They wanted me to get naturalised,' says Cavalcanti, 'and I didn't want to get naturalised... I don't believe I could be English just by changing my passport, and as I couldn't become French...' And then he adds that there were people appointed to the films division of the Ministry of Information whom he did not like: 'I was unhappy... So I was looking for a job, and Mick (Balcon) had lost lots of his technical people because they had been mobilised... and my contract with Ealing was very pleasant because I had one film as associate producer and one film as director. So that suited me fine, and I felt that I was much better remaining a Brazilian at Mick's place.'

'We were all a bit at sixes and sevens at the outbreak of war because there were signs that the Government had in mind throwing the film industry overboard and not bothering about it very much,' says Michael Balcon. 'It was a curious position because they had founded the Ministry of Information... and indeed there was a films division there, but there wasn't very much direction as far as the then Post Office film unit was concerned. That was quite in the early days. I think there was an element of dissatisfaction amongst these men who felt that they were capable of making a greater contribution. Many of them, and Cavalcanti in particular, were terribly worried by the sort of bureaucratic control that was even stronger in wartime than in peacetime, and there were signs that the unit was going to break up. Happily it was restored later on, because Dalrymple was made the head of the unit and he





Valerie Taylor in 'Went the Day Well?' (1942): '... an important British film, I think it was'

whipped it into shape and it did magnificent work during the war. But at this particular time they wanted a breakaway, and there were opportunities at Ealing and Cavalcanti was the first to come over. We told him that if we were allowed to go on—there was some doubt at the outbreak of war—we'd be very happy to have him because, apart from anything else, apart from his great talents as a film-maker, any sort of personnel that could be retained without difficulty was something to be grateful for.'

For the second time in England, Cavalcanti found himself in an atmosphere in which he was almost completely at home. His memories of Ealing are full of affection. 'Mick was the best producer I ever had,' he says. 'He was very understanding. He had been in films for years, and he knew the public and he had a sense of box-office that was quite deep, because sometimes he said, when he saw the rushes, "I don't like this. That must be remade." If you kept on trying to ask "Why, Mick?" or "Can't you tell me what's wrong?" very often he didn't know, but he sensed it was wrong. He had an uncanny sort of instinctive sense of films.'

'He fitted into our pattern very well because, you see, I was at the crossroads myself,' says Balcon. 'By the time the war broke out, I'd been at it for twenty years and so had Cavalcanti, but Cavalcanti had devoted his life to what we now call the documentary field. I had spent the whole of my time in the normal commercial field where, I suppose, the motives that guided us were (a) to found what we thought to be a native industry without being dominated by America, and (b) of course to make films which were as good in marketing terms as the American films which then dominated the whole world. I don't think we had our minds very much upon finer

issues which developed later, as to the importance of the films and what they meant in social terms. We were engaged in a commercial operation.

'I felt of course—most of us felt quite definitely at the outbreak of war—that the type of film we'd been making in the past would not do, either in war conditions or in the future, and that is why I was eager to get Cav into the studio. I felt sure, to use these ugly words, some cross-fertilisation of our respective experiences, something different, would emerge—and indeed it did. I suppose, to an extent, because he had certain influences on the Ealing output... It's not being egocentric to say that I was in charge of the whole output there and my word went, but it was a very democratic control that I exercised and the whole thing was run on a group basis, and of all the group there—and there were some very talented people—I would say that Cavalcanti was the most important and the most talented of the people available to talk to and work with.'

What sort of influence did Cavalcanti have on Ealing films? Balcon pointed out that most of Ealing's young talents like Charles Frend, Penrose Tennyson, Charles Crichton, Robert Hamer got their first chance to direct there: 'Now, however talented they were—because take a man like Hamer, he was a minor poet, a brilliant mathematician and could have had a career anywhere—they were still short of experience in dealing with visual images on the screen. And this is what Cavalcanti could do for them. He was a vastly experienced man as to how to transfer images to the screen—a curious man, you know, in some respects, until he got going. By virtue of the fact that he didn't know English very well, he could sometimes be completely inarticulate, especially when he got excited. But somehow when he was on

the floor, near the camera, talking to these people, just some little things he could do would make all the difference... Men like Charles Frend, good as they were, made better films with Cavalcanti by their side... Apart from anything else, he was a man of infinite taste. He knew about settings. He knew about music. He knew about European literature. He was a highly civilised man. They all were, but he was a particularly outstanding figure... All those things helped to make good films...'

'This is why, and I may be wrong, I always thought that Cavalcanti was better producer material than he was director material. Now that doesn't in any way denigrate him because, in the days that we were working, I thought the talents were equally important and probably the production talent rather more important. But everybody doesn't think that way, and most producers always want to be directors. Cavalcanti wanted to be a director, and of course he directed some films of some importance, but I still think his great work was and still could be if he were going on today, in production and the influences he brings to bear on other people. I think that must inevitably be so with films in the English language because, even if he speaks many languages, there must be some difficulties in directing English actors for anybody who hasn't complete mastery of the language. From the visual side he'd always be all right. Whether he was equally good in the direction of actors is a matter for discussion.

'One thing I want to emphasise is that he is a great film man. If I point out what appear to be certain slight weaknesses or imperfections, it is because it would be wrong if I didn't. It wouldn't be fair to a really very important man... I know no better sequence for direction than the last incident in *Dead of Night*. If you look at it and examine it, it's still largely a terrifically visual sequence. This is Cavalcanti at his best. Another film that was well directed by Cavalcanti was *Went the Day Well?*. Oddly enough, it's never been recognised as an important British film. I think it was.'

Based on a story by Graham Greene, who seems not to have liked the film ('We added so many episodes,' says Cavalcanti, 'that perhaps he couldn't recognise it'), *Went the Day Well?* (1942) is an imaginary account of what happened during the German occupation of the English village of Bramley End over the Whitsun weekend of 1942. The Germans, disguised in British uniforms but just occasionally giving themselves away by, for instance, bashing a troublesome small boy about the head, writing their sevens in the continental way, or bringing the odd bar of 'Schokolade Wien' from home with them, have their path smoothed by British quisling Leslie Banks. All the adult villagers are rounded up in the church; the children confined in an upstairs room of Marie Lohr's manor. Nice people who try to resist are ruthlessly put down, until the tide turns in favour of the villagers. It is devastating to see the cold-blooded revenge they now wreak on the men they had initially entertained as guests in the vicarage, the manor-house and elsewhere according to their station. Sweet young English



girls are seizing the guns from German corpses, vying with each other to shoot down as many of the beastly hun as possible. It's not like killing real people. It's a sort of sport. The main emphasis that Cavalcanti himself puts on the film, which he regards as his best film at Ealing, is its deeply pacifist nature: 'People of the kindest character, such as the people in that small English village, as soon as war touches them, become absolutely monsters.' It says something for the British film industry and government that such a film was able to emerge at such a time, and the fact that there were some reactions against it is hardly surprising.

*Went the Day Well?* pulls together most of the threads that run through Cavalcanti's work: the documentary authenticity, the drama, the surrealism. A remarkable thing about him is that, despite being a Brazilian with a European background, or perhaps because of it, he could put his finger precisely on the essential Britishness of the British and make it a special point of interest. The documentary

grim humour of certain scenes in *Went the Day Well?* where realism has simply been carried a stage further into surrealism. This kind of effect can be achieved only by first ensuring plausibility and then demonstrating the implausibility of the plausible. The only British director who has become master of it is Lindsay Anderson, and it is interesting to realise that in this way Anderson's documentary roots are much closer to Cavalcanti (himself an ardent admirer of the work of Humphrey Jennings) than to Grierson.

Although the other features Cavalcanti directed at Ealing—*Champagne Charlie* and *Nicholas Nickleby*—are less noteworthy, he was also involved in a programme of short films which Michael Balcon describes as having been 'right up Cavalcanti's street'. Some of these he directed—propaganda films like *Yellow Caesar*, instructional films like *Watertight* which (oddly?) are not included in the main histories of British documentary. Cavalcanti is still very enthusiastic about the distribution that these documentaries got in the cinemas, because

some extremely angry reactions from British documentarists. According to Paul Rotha, still apparently bitter about it when writing his *Documentary Diary* of 1973, it 'did less than justice to the social aims of the British documentary group, whose work as shown, when at all, was inadequate and false. In spite of protests by the Associated Realist Film Producers, especially in a strong letter to *The Times*, the film was not withdrawn although some film libraries abroad would not distribute it. It is, I am told, still in use in some places today.'

Rotha goes on to report an argument that took place in the *New Statesman* in June 1942, as a result of film critic William Whitebait's remark that Ministry of Information films 'set a very high standard indeed; and the tradition that has produced them owes more to Cavalcanti than to any other man.' To this Rotha replied that 'one man, and one man only, John Grierson, was responsible for the birth and inspiration of the 300-odd British documentary films made between 1929 and 1939, including those of which Cavalcanti was himself director.' Harry Watt then joined in: 'It was Grierson's drive and initiative that obtained the formation and sponsoring of the EMB Film Unit, from which eventually so many offshoots have sprung. But I, as a film worker with both men, would like to say that I am convinced that it was the introduction of Cavalcanti's professional skill and incredible film sense that raised the standard and reputation of British documentary to the pitch where today it has become a considerable influence on the cinema as a whole.'

Rotha then claims: 'For my own part, as a result of my letter quoted above, I was told that references to my work were in due course removed from *Film and Reality*.' To this he appends the footnote: 'I am happy to record, however, that Cavalcanti and I have always remained the best of friends.'

Cavalcanti does not deny the friendship. The trouble, he suggests, was because the film was too long and he cut out the only Rotha excerpt along with one or two others. 'Rotha was very cross about it. He wanted to be in it.' Cavalcanti also explains: 'With my wrong sense of humour I did a bad turn to Grierson. I put Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave* over *Drifters*, which was putting it back into romantic sort of films, and I don't think that pleased Grierson at all... But really you must realise that Grierson at the bottom was quite a demagogue. Yes, his parents being parsons and so on, he had a kind of disposition for preaching. And preaching and that sort of thing delighted him, and he was very good at it too, I thought.'

The truth of the matter is that the only thing seriously wrong with Cavalcanti's *Film and Reality* is that it is not the selection that Grierson or Rotha would have made. On the contrary, it gives an encouraging impression of the wide variety of film material shot in a realistic vein long before British documentary was even contemplated. From Marey and the Lumière brothers, through early newsreels and interest films, clips from the *Secrets of Nature* and X-ray films used in medical diagnosis, there is no mention of British documentary except to say that Charles Urban, director of *Romance*



'Dead of Night' (1945): '... this is Cavalcanti at his best'

movement may have gained more than anyone was aware of from this ability of his to see and draw out what was there already. Michael Balcon describes what his arrival meant to Ealing: 'I don't think that up to that point the films I was concerned with, with certain exceptions, had a special trade mark of their own. We know the Jessie Matthews comedies were this; the Hulbert and Courtneidge comedies were that; but the outputs as a whole didn't have any particular stamp to them. He certainly helped me, probably more than anybody else, to create an image. The whole of the Ealing output had a certain stamp on it. Whether I would have done it on my own I don't know. But most certainly I acknowledge, and always have acknowledged, that of all the help I got his is the help that was the most important.'

That surrealism is part of Cavalcanti's view of life has been evident from the outset, but the British are not naturally given to understanding surrealism or the various extensions or applications of it. As far as Cavalcanti is concerned, we are likely to be much more impressed by the surrealist shock tactics of *Dead of Night* than by the

each of them went out with a big picture. Balcon finds less significance in this: 'They were propaganda films during wartime, and there were fewer films available in wartime than there were in most normal times... As you know, short films have always been a difficult market, because only West End houses ran these supporting short feature programmes. Most of the houses in the provinces have always gone for double feature programmes. In wartime it was different... Also I might tell you that although they liked us to make them and we could get them into the West End, I can't pretend that even in wartime the rest of the country were falling over themselves to book these films. They had to be forced wherever we could in support of features.'

The documentary story never really changes. It only seems to now and then.

At the beginning of the war Cavalcanti also completed an anthology film called *Film and Reality*, which was commissioned by the British Film Institute. A sensible and occasionally exciting collection of excerpts from realist films including newsreels, produced up to that time, it provoked



of the Railway (1907) was grandfather of it. *Song of Ceylon* eventually comes up at the end of a section (mainly devoted to Flaherty) about 'Romantic Documentaries of Faraway Places'. *Drifters*, *Industrial Britain*, *Housing Problems* and *Night Mail* occupy part of a section (which opens with *Rien que les heures*) on 'Realistic Documentaries of Life at Home'. Here British documentary is described as a 'movement to use films for civic education'. Here too an extract from a French film made by Jean Benoit-Lévy in 1932, showing a potter making a pot, compares very well with one's memory of the similar sequence shot by Flaherty in 1931 for *Industrial Britain* and admired almost to distraction by Grierson. At the end of this section Pare Lorentz's *Plow that Broke the Plains* is described as owing much to the British school. Then Cavalcanti moves on to 'Realism in the Story Film': Stiller, James Cruze, Eisenstein, Zecca, Dieterle, Méliès, Pabst, Renoir etc., obviously nothing more of British documentary.

I cannot help feeling that Cavalcanti had worked with the documentary movement long enough to realise that Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave* was not the only bad turn he would be accused of having done to Grierson in all this. In fact, he dared to give the impression that his conception of 'realist films' was wider than the idea which Grierson labelled 'documentary'. If it was his 'wrong sense of humour' that made him go so far, I do feel that he has since paid dearly for it.

How is it possible to be fair to everybody in circumstances like these? Pointless to say the arguments don't matter because they do—particularly when the spokesman for a movement famed for its liberal-mindedness can still regret some thirty-five years later that an intelligent and informative film has not been taken out of circulation. I can only say thankfully that I saw the film recently at the British Film Institute, that as long as this applies reassessments are possible, and the chance remains that time will set everything right.

'If there is a British cinema,' says Michael Balcon, 'I would put Cavalcanti's contribution pretty well as high as any... because in a curious way the work he did doesn't reflect itself in credit titles.' This is the problem. Cavalcanti's reputation is to quite a large extent dependent on the word of those who worked with him, but no injustice is necessarily implied by this. Very often there was no way to indicate by means of credits an influence as varied and subtle as his. Like Grierson's initial feat in getting finance for documentary, the stamp that Cavalcanti subsequently put on it could only be belittled by the sort of abbreviated job descriptions that credit titles amount to. This is perhaps why it still remains unclear whether Cavalcanti really cared about having credits at the time or not. It was always a debatable kind of compliment.

Cavalcanti still speaks warmly of the atmosphere at Ealing: 'There were no petty jealousies, no difficulties at all.' Yet he left Ealing in the late 1940s, basically because it seemed to him that he could earn more as a freelance than under the terms of his Ealing contract. He and Michael Balcon disagree about the fairness of the deal he was getting from Ealing at the time, but

both say he left in order to earn more money.

'It was a change of mood,' says Balcon. 'All the wonderful things, the group things we did, the ideas which made us tick during the war, began to disintegrate. There wasn't the same motive, and it became a harsher and rather more cynical period. People's values began to alter, and their success began to be measured in terms of money, and if Cav were to completely examine himself over these things, he was tempted away the same as all the other people. It was Oscar Wilde who said that a man can resist everything except temptation, and this is what happened...'

'I'm the first to admit that this group work of ours worked for twenty years, but when we gave it up none of us as individuals were as important as we were collectively... Everybody went out and had plenty of things to do, but when you come to examine it in terms of results none of us were as good separately as we were together. I think that Cav missed it more than anybody I know, and I'm not talking about the support he got from me or from anybody else. I just talk of it in general terms, the support he got from being with Ealing Studios.'

Certainly Cavalcanti's career seems rarely to have been as satisfying or as successful since he left Ealing. Around 1950 he left England altogether, apparently intending to set up home in his native Brazil. When I asked him about this in an earlier interview, in 1971, he said, 'Oh, don't talk about it. It was a mistake to go to Brazil, and I lost in fact everything I had. It's quite an unhappy adventure. No, it is a mistake to send a boy of fifteen away from his country, because it's from fifteen to twenty-five you settle your entourage and choose your friends.'

In the latest interview he described a very confusing situation in which he was trying to create a film industry which would have a real local spirit in São Paulo, while Italian technicians were plotting to push out the other nationalities, and Americans were accusing him of being a communist and there were documents reminiscent of the Inquisition deposited in the Brazilian

Foreign Office. (I hope I have interpreted his meaning here correctly.) Certainly he said he had a contract for three years, but that at the end of the first year he was thrown out because they didn't understand what he was after. He made two films and was halfway through another. He had six complete scripts ready for the second year, but after he left, production was almost at a standstill for two years.

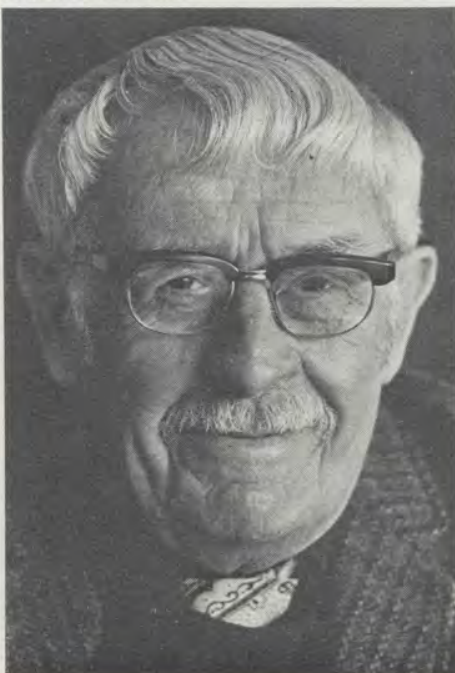
'Why did you go to Brazil?' I asked him. 'I lost my mother,' he said. (His mother was a considerable personality, known to all his friends as a great and good influence on his life.) 'And I had a big project for an independent production. I had the rights of *Sparkenbroke* by Charles Morgan. It was—I still believe it was—the best script I ever made. It's a bad novel, but it's a good film story... I had made all the choice of locations, and I had discovered beautiful places that were quite unknown, and all of a sudden I received from that collaborator of Rank (I was working for him) a letter saying that my script was above the understanding of the public. I had lots of times in my life had it told to me, and of course I was disgusted. It was about four months work, and very expensive work. To make a long script is a big job. So I had an invitation to go to Brazil to lecture about films to the Museum of Modern Art at São Paulo, and I accepted and went.'

Cavalcanti's story is latterly a sad one. There can be no getting away from that, although I feel at a disadvantage in commenting on the later years because there have been a number of films in Brazil, Austria, Rumania, Italy (in the 1950s) and more recently a couple of plays (one of them by Dürrenmatt) on French television which I, like most people in Britain, have not seen. The Austrian film, *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* (1955), was based on the comedy by Berthold Brecht, and something of the charm that endeared Cavalcanti to the many British film-makers who have been indebted to him, emerges very simply from his account of his first meeting with the revered Brecht:

'I had a great, great admiration for him. I thought he was a master—even better than a playwright, he was a great poet. I liked scripting what he did very much, and the first script he refused. The second script (*Herr Puntila*) he sent me (I hadn't met him), I refused. It was the play; he hadn't changed a line. So I said at the start—he had made lawsuits against Fritz Lang, against Pabst, against all my colleagues—so I said, "I am in the basket. He's going to annoy me no end." But I had a very intelligent woman producer, who said, "Look here, this is silly. You and Brecht are made to be friends and to understand each other. You speak the same language. Come with me to Berlin." And I shall never forget—it was a summer day like this—and I came to his house. The big room had three windows towards the cemetery. He immediately took me by the arm, as if he knew me all the time. He knew I had refused his script. He knew we were going to try together to make one, and he took me to the window and said, "Do you know who is buried there?" I said, "No." He said, "Hegel."

'It's a sad thing to say,' Cav added, 'that he is buried just by Hegel now.'

Alberto Cavalcanti







# FESTIVALS 75



Sembène's 'Xala'; Gérard Depardieu in Goretta's 'Pas si Méchant que ça'

## Locarno

On the open air screen, ten times larger than life, an actor was robbing a bank. Behind the screen, with precision timing, fireworks exploded in celebration of a Swiss national holiday. Since the film was also Swiss, this accidental irony raised a sour smile on the faces of critics still reeling from the price of a modest meal in a resort town with a bank on every corner. But even the Swiss are feeling the pinch. Locarno was forced to make budgetary cutbacks this year; perhaps that was why Mastroianni, much heralded, never did arrive.

But as a festival Locarno is more concerned that the public should see the films than watch the stars. It was a crowded

programme. From Cannes, and already reported in these pages, came *Souvenirs d'en France*, the Straubs' *Moses and Aaron*, the suspended animation of Marguerite Duras' *India Song* (whose last waltz was greeted with relieved applause), and the monumental, magnificent *O Thiasos*, to my mind the outstanding film of the year. From Berlin there was Wim Wenders' *Falsche Bewegung*, the more edgily beguiling for missing a reel during its projection. Also from Berlin came Sohrab Shahid Sales' *In der Fremde*. As in his earlier films, this uncompromising Iranian director works through repetition, his style so unemphatic that the slightest modulation (the same action seen from different perspectives, for instance) carries a charge. Sales' camera simply fastens, in long, uninflected takes,

on the daily routine of a Turkish worker in Berlin, a *Gastarbeiter* like any other.

We see him at his job, a dedicated prisoner to his monotonous machine; travelling home on the underground, where only a drunk will talk to him; walking home to the shabby rooms he shares with other Turkish workers, and where he occasionally writes letters home and regularly counts his money. The determined austerity has an almost mesmeric effect; and seems almost too calculated until one begins to feel the enervating isolation of these mortgaged lives. For all that the foreign worker tries to engage with his adopted city (and he does try, inarticulately but with an innocent single-mindedness), he might just as well have come from another planet.

Life in a German city is also the subject of **In Gefahr und grösster Not bringt der Mittelweg der Tod** (translated as *The Middle of the Road is a Very Dead End*), co-directed by Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz. A film of fragments, rough and random, its general focus is a girl agent from the East whose mission is to compile a dossier on the secrets of the Federal Republic. She has a male companion, who studies Marx 'in the original' (and is consequently little seen) and who has persuaded her that the real secrets are to be found in everyday events. Of which we see a pointedly disordered collage (police concert, scientific congress, a visit to the cinema), framed by a newsreel account of the clash between demonstrators and police provoked by the demolition of some old houses. The purpose, in a film which is closer in style to *Artistes at the Top of the Big Top* than to *Occupations of a Female Slave*, is to confront the audience with a reflection of reality as it is perceived from day to day. The state 'secret' is the lives of its citizens; a crane demolishing a house makes an 'ideological' statement; a political cliché is a powerful weapon in the hands of a politician. The girl's report is rejected: her boss wants facts, not lyrical impressions. Facts, answers the film, are easy to find; what is difficult is how you order them. The film's own difficulty, of course, is that it risks making precisely the same blurred impression which it seeks to dispel in its carefully ordered randomness.

A more private reality is the focus of the Belgian **Le Fils d'Amr est mort**, a first feature by Jean-Jacques Andrien which, unaccountably to some, took the main prize. Pierre Clémenti sleepwalks through the film as the only friend of a Tunisian who has killed himself in Brussels. To find out why, Clémenti goes to the friend's Tunisian village, where he finds nothing but a kind of death in life—the torpor of rite and ritual in the desert. The Tunisian scenes were shot (majestically) in the region which opposed, to its cost, Bourguiba's 'sell-out' to France: a shimmering perspective for the betrayal of a man befriended but never known. The journey south, of course, is one of self-discovery—echoes of *The Passenger*, confirmed when at his press conference the director revealed his debt to Laing and *The Divided Self*. But if the Tunisian section is hallucinatory, the Belgian scenes are simply hermetic, an over-calculated effort at mystification through *mise en scène*.

An altogether different kind of culture clash was the point of departure for



Ousmane Sembene's **Xala**. The French leave Senegal, a momentous event succinctly paraphrased in a prologue showing the French chamber of commerce handing over their attaché cases to their African protégés. What follows is an acidly funny (and deadly serious) demonstration that the new business elite are as 'colonial' as their former masters, now relegated to the ante-room and the back seat of the chauffeur-driven car. As in *The Money Order*, the satire is housed within a simple story. Amid much pomp and ceremony an ageing business tycoon takes a third wife, only to find himself impotent; the cure (potions and witch doctors) so engrosses him that he lets his business collapse, is expelled by his colleagues, and in a final fall from grace is physically humiliated by a motley crew of beggars and cripples.

The satire is broad. At the wedding party wives one and two (an older, 'traditional' woman who is yet no man's chattel, and a younger, Europeanised chatterbox in dark glasses) sit in a back room drinking Coca Cola and feeling 'de trop'. The businessman not only drinks specially imported Evian water but has his car washed in it. Some of this is perhaps too broad for a European audience, who ought to be feeling uncomfortable. But then Sembene doesn't make his films for European audiences.

There is a freshness about this Senegalese film which made many of the European movies look jaded. Italy, for instance, was represented by four films which in their different ways simply evoked memories of other, better Italian films. Leading the field was Francesco Maselli's **Il Sospetto**, a stylish (but too stylised) account of dissension and betrayal within the Italian Communist Party during the early years of Fascism. Gian Maria Volonté is an errant Party member rehabilitated and sent on a mission to Paris and Turin to root out suspected traitors—only to be betrayed himself. At the centre of the film is an honest, scrupulously fair debate about aims and methods, common loyalty and individual conviction. But the focus is blurred by a period background so meticulously reconstructed that it looks quite artificial. The same could be said of Mauro Bolognini's **Per le Antiche Scale**, set during the same period in a psychiatric institution (Mastroianni presiding) which represents a noisy metaphor for the collective madness of fascism. Gloss, however symbolic, needs to be distanced if it is not to appear merely glossy.

Gloss, expensively applied, is both the appeal and the irritation of Wajda's **The Promised Land**. This massive story of wheeling and dealing in the textile industry in Lodz at the turn of the century has all the expected narrative drive and not a little of the familiar Wajda conjunction of the baroque and the ironic. The romantic gesture here is capitalist enterprise run riot (and sinisterly fed by Jewish money), and the seedy, sickly nether world of acquired wealth is thoroughly and expertly mapped. But the fairly simple truths are swamped by the grandiosity of style and decor: Wajda makes Lodz look like an industrial suburb of David Lean's Moscow. In the context the red flag which briefly flutters at the end seems a shade irrelevant. After this heady extravagance the other Polish

film, Krzysztof Wojciechowski's **Love Your Neighbour**, was a breath of fresh air. A sort of Polish *Akenfield*, but with much more bite, it adroitly accommodates its rural events (a land dispute, the return of a concert pianist son) within an almost documentary format.

British cinema was conspicuous by its absence. A lesson could be learnt from the Norwegians, who turned up in force to support their entry: Anja Breien's lively **Wives** (already seen in London), and the not so lively **Fru Inger of Östråt**, a version of an early Ibsen play about 16th century courtly intrigue. Apart from *Konfrontation*, discussed from Cannes, the host country offered Markus Imhoof's **Fluchtgefahr**, a capable, sympathetic study of prison life, and Claude Goretta's **Pas si Méchant que ça**, which must be registered as a disappointment after *The Invitation*. Goretta doesn't quite get the necessary distance into his story of a cabinet-maker who keeps his small, unsuccessful company on its feet by robbing banks and post offices, eventually with the aid of a postmistress (Marlène Jobert) who is seduced by his innocent application. An undoubted charm does not quite fill the gap between ironic intention (isolation, complacency, perhaps a larger metaphor about the Swiss mind) and what is actually on the screen.

America opened and closed the festival with **French Connection No. 2** and Walter Hill's unexceptional **The Streetfighter**. Rather more interest was aroused in some quarters by Tobe Hooper's **Texas Chainsaw Massacre**, a gory celluloid horror comic which, apart from its undeniably animated finale (involving a power-driven chainsaw and barbecued victims), hardly seems worth the rumpus it is certainly going to create. Karen Arthur's **Legacy** will also ruffle a few sensibilities. A monologue for a middle-aged, middle-class American woman (a virtuoso turn by Joan Hotchkis, who also wrote it) whose frustrations find relief in fantasy, it steers a nicely balanced course from comedy through desperation to hysteria.

DAVID WILSON

## Berlin

Bad films, runs the truism, are more easily defined by type than good ones. The 25th Berlin International Film Festival not only lived up to the cliché but virtually enshrined it; during more than a week of sifting what resembled a vast cornucopia of left-overs from the international cinema (the main meal being Cannes?), the most profitable critical activity proved to be mapping out the categories into which the films might most conveniently be shovelled and forgotten. They could be defined by theme: varieties of culture shock were examined, with *Gastarbeiten* subjects from France and Germany, a period soap opera from Japan, **Sandakan, House No. 8**, about the export of girls for prostitution, and a menacing stranger story, **Gangsterfilmen**, from Sweden. They could be grouped by style: the unaccented naturalism of TV drama weighing down such sagas of domestic life as Krzysztof Zanussi's **The Balance** and, closer to the *Coronation Street* end of the scale, the German **Familienglück**. Or they might simply be crated as national or regional products: India provided one stodgy allegory about the world and the spirit and one frivolous allegory about politics and corruption, while the East European bloc returned to invigorating socialist drama with Jiri Menzel's story of a boy, a girl and a truck, and a folksy Soviet affair about an ex-con prevented by his past from returning to the land.

The categories naturally overlap and interweave, and eventually form a dense little grid made up of all the basic platitudes of subject and expression. Some good things escaped the mesh and usually drifted to the periphery of the 'Young Forum', the alternative event which now seems to have the financial means to put on as good a show as the main festival, and the far-ranging programming to scoop it for the best films. The pity is that the features given showcase treatment by the Forum, with benefit of simultaneous ear-

Wim Wenders' 'Falsche Bewegung'





phone translation, were mostly as recognisable by type (and too often the same types) as those in the competitive event. The real attractions were tucked, mad-deningly, behind these dreary showpieces, and beyond the multilingual paraphernalia needed to make them fully accessible.

Wim Wenders' **Falsche Bewegung**, adapted from—or rather, it seems, constructed as a parallel case to—Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, is a densely recorded rite of passage for its hero, as impenetrable in the verbal traps he is constantly setting for himself and others as it is exhilarating in Wenders' visual celebration of a landscape unencumbered by all the ratiocinative obsessions of the main character. As teasing companions and essential baggage on Wilhelm's problematic pilgrimage (the 'false movement' of the title), undertaken as an attempt to break through to a reality both within and outside himself, Wenders provides an amusing assortment of familiar faces, from old reliable Hans Christian Blech to Fassbinder regular Hanna Schygulla. Fassbinder's second—and more than likely not his last—film for the year, **Mutter Küsters Fahrt zum Himmel**, rejected by the main festival and scheduled to be shown under the aegis of the Forum though not officially a part of their programme, was generally received by those who had already seen it as indispensable theatre of the grotesque, jumping with both feet into political hot water.

In terms of length, the main Forum films certainly had an edge on the competition features, though few of these loosely 'dramatic documentary' and generally political essays seemed to justify their extra swathes of celluloid in terms of their faint and boringly programmed gestures at argument. Repetition threatened to blunt the point of *Nessuno o tutti*, a massive compilation, worked on by Marco Bellocchio among others, concerned with the institutional treatment of the insane in Italy. Its contention is that the institutions themselves are a worse disease than the disability they are treating, preserving an unnatural distinction between the 'sane' and 'insane' by shutting away people whose best help, as the Brechtian title would have it, lies with 'No one or everyone. All or nothing. No one can save himself alone.' The film is divided into two parts, but shows considerably more investigative resource in the first half (before a hammering, didactic tone sets in), comparing three case histories, convincingly documenting the environmental origins of the problems, and demonstrating in a final interview with all three together the wholly familiar range of their foibles and failings, their similar strengths simply as three individuals, and the mixture of pain and absurd comedy in their experience of clinical 'care'.

Another social malady—the stern commandment of property law—is at the root of conflict in *Winstanley* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's meticulous re-creation of the Digger movement in 17th century England, which turned up in the Forum to add some substance to its weedier political themes. Although brought to a halt a little too often by the film-makers'

determination to sculpt loving images in pristine black and white, the film proceeds intelligently, through a tableau-like series of scenes, to record the desperate idealism of the Diggers, and subtly does justice to the dilemma of the newly victorious Parliamentary forces.

Two other British films appeared in the competition, and might fairly rest in peace there. Stuart Cooper's **Overlord** was a technically accomplished, gallopingly ambitious effort to blend documentary footage (of the Allied preparations for the Normandy invasion) with the fictional story of one soldier caught up in and finally crushed by the juggernaut of war. Cooper overreaches himself in his hunt for stylistic devices—a fantasy farewell between the soldier and his sweetheart, premonitory dreams and flashes of his own death—which will bolster a rather pointless technical exercise. Alan Bridges' **Out of Season** returns to the familiar English terrain of the theatrical chamber-piece, and the familiar haunted house of a nearly deserted seaside resort, and lets a few spooks loose for a nostalgic gambol.

The American features made a respectable fist at providing some solid entertainment. Woody Allen's **Love and Death** begins in brisk scene-setting style, establishing its general *War and Peace* parody as a useful springboard for Allen's usual personification of an inferiority complex run rampant. He proves less successful than in *Sleeper*, however, at maintaining the visual interest, and the film eventually slides into hit or miss verbal cut-ups reminiscent of the earlier *Bananas*, with Allen repeating his favourite Eisenstein jokes, and providing a couple of new Bergman ones, in the way of visual spicing.

Inevitably, the little oases of one or two

Tarkovsky's *'The Mirror'*



retrospective events beckoned in the general desert of the festival. One of the most tantalising offerings, Kozintsev and Trauberg's 1926 version of Gogol's *The Overcoat*, proved somewhat disappointing. Another Gogol story, *Nevsky Avenue*, has been added as a way of introducing and establishing the downtrodden clerk, and the story of the overcoat itself almost reduced to an epilogue, with the atmosphere of the original compressed and distorted into caricaturist grotesquerie, and the latter part of the tale, concerning the ghostly happenings after the clerk's death, deleted altogether. The Garbo season gave a thorough airing to the standard classics, and turned up such little seen delights as the 1931 *Inspiration*, a tear-jerker directed in as smooth and supple a fashion as could be imagined by Clarence Brown. The haunted figure of Conrad Veidt proved manically impressive once again in Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* (until the film lets him down in the latter stages); and put in his briefest and strangest appearance in Murnau's *Der Gang in die Nacht*, an incomplete, untitled, and rather stagily handled little drama of love's labour lost and crossed, but appealingly neurotic in tone and nowhere more demented than in the aura that surrounds the shattered figure of Veidt's blind artist-lover.

RICHARD COMBS

## Moscow

Although Moscow claims to cover a wider field than any other festival, nearly a hundred participating countries do not guarantee quality. Schematic social sagas from Third World countries, whose revolutionary histrionics often had the look of some old Hollywood B picture, were thick on the ground. The *raison d'être* of this Festival, however, is the opportunity it provides to see the latest Soviet productions, spread out, as usual, in cinemas all over town and given minimum advertisement.

The talk around Moscow concerning Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* suggested that it was 'very difficult' and 'not for mass audiences'; but I suspect that given literate subtitles (and without the standard festival distractions of opening doors, flashing lights and the murmurings of simultaneous translators all over the hall), it would not seem more 'difficult' than Resnais or late Bergman. These two artists seem to be Tarkovsky's main mentors, plus an occasional reference to the Buñuel of the 1920s, yet in its visual preoccupations with nature and the past *The Mirror* inhabits what we can now perceive as Tarkovsky's world. The non-narrative construction passes freely from past to present and back to the war years (with some sensational army footage) as the main characters, comprising a wife, two children both young and grown-up and various colleagues, reminisce about their feelings, attitudes and the waning beauty of the world. As in *Solaris*, the elements play a major role, with mysterious shimmerings over a grassy meadow as a wind strikes up from nowhere, with the rainstorms which continually spatter outside windows and the quiet country scene which is suddenly



transfigured by the glow of a nearby fire.

Some of the juxtapositions *do* appear wilfully obscure on a first viewing (I was sometimes puzzled by the alternation between black and white and, for a Soviet film, superbly controlled colour), but eventually the constant surprises offered by the images overwhelmed me. Even when the narrative threads knit more closely together, as they undoubtedly will, I suspect that Tarkovsky's vision of his child's world will remain his film's finest achievement. Time and again, he cuts back to the green forest with the children wandering through the lazy summer days until, near the end, the little boy finds himself alone in the house, with a soft breeze floating the curtains out into the room and the camera tracking towards a mirror reflecting the child clutching a jar of milk to his breast. Mirrors reveal memories as well as faces, Tarkovsky seems to be saying.

Kurosawa's long-awaited Mosfilm production **Dersu Uzala** (made in co-operation with Japan) deservedly won the main Gold Prize, though its subject—the friendship of a Russian scientist, traveller and writer with an old hunter from the *taiga* at the beginning of this century—may surprise those expecting a display of Kurosawa bravura. In fact, the film might be described as an intimate epic; grandly shot in 70 mm. in a strictly classical style, rather slow at first and with absolutely no trimmings, it is a hymn to nature and friendship, and Kurosawa's most obviously Fordian film for many years. Occasionally, its simple virtues verge on the simplistic, with a touch of early Kipling in its depiction of benevolent officer and wise, primitive hunter. But the relationship is given great point and feeling, aided by a remarkably detailed performance by Maxim Munzuk, a small, wizened veteran actor from the Tuva theatre. The trek across snowy wastes and forests which constitutes the main narrative is broken up by two exemplary virtuoso sequences—the first depicting the desperate building of a grass hut to protect the two men from the icy night; the second, a rescue from a treacherous river. And the silent final sequence, with the scientist paying homage over the hunter's grave (reminiscent of the memorial to the last of the Seven Samurai), has a quiet solemnity achievable only by the greatest artists.

Following their adaptation of *The Bath House*, veteran director Sergei Yutkevich and his collaborator Anatoly Karanovich continue their exploration of Mayakovsky's works in **Mayakovsky Laughs**, which turned out to be the most surprising Soviet work on view. Based loosely on *The Bed Bug* and *Forget about the Fireplace*, it is a collage film taking in live action, animation, puppetry, old film clips and even glimpses of how the film was shot. It must have been fun to make, and for much of the time Yutkevich's sophisticated sense of parody, with some weird and wonderful pseudo-Constructivist designs, lively songs and a playful juggling of cinematic devices, gives it a rich surface. Unhappily, it goes over the top about halfway through with a long animated sequence showing Mayakovsky in a crudely hippie-ridden America, indicating that the Soyuzmultfilm cartoon studio is fully aware of Fritz the Cat and his



Above: Kurosawa's 'Dersu Uzala'; below 'Mayakovsky Laughs'

descendants. Goodness knows what Mayakovsky would have made of it all; at times it seems intent on diminishing him, at others it suddenly illuminates the text with an absolutely precise visual equivalent. But at least it proves that the Soviet cinema can still turn out a genuinely experimental and (dreaded word) formalistic film, executed with great technical dexterity.

Among the smaller pleasures from the Festival proper, Stig Björkman's **The White Wall** won Harriet Andersson a Best Actress prize. At first glance, a somewhat stereotyped study of yet another alienated woman with a small son and no proper qualifications for a job, it is given real depth by Miss Andersson's dedicated playing and Björkman's glancing observation of the milieu in which she moves: the cold offices, the lonely flat with a sleeping companion for one night, the noisy dance with the inevitable young wolves to be warded off.

Unlike *La Maman et la Putain*, with its tense and talkative emotionalism, Jean

Eustache's **Mes Petites Amoureuses** has an open country look, with comparatively little dialogue and a flowing, easy style. A teenage boy goes out into the world for his first job as a bicycle mechanic, finds friends and mixes with girls for the first time, then returns home to think about the future. Familiar material, but Eustache brings to it an expansive feeling for the little towns and villages, with their close community ties, Sunday promenades along the *grande rue* and secretive flirting in cinemas. When he applies an intense Bressonian tone to the wanderings of the young boy (Martin Loeb), the structure wilts under the strain, but when he allows a sequence to find its own feet, like the long closing episode on the road with the boy vying with his companions for a girl's attention, Eustache can evoke a Vigo-like world of tenderness and hidden desires. Luscious, deep-toned colour photography from Nestor Almendros, the indispensable collaborator for the latter-day *nouvelle vague*.

JOHN GILLET





# IN THE PICTURE

## Cuckoo's Nest

The question of what constitutes mental illness, how to depict it and the proper attitude towards it, was Milos Forman's biggest challenge on *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, the film adaptation of Ken Kesey's celebrated novel. Published in 1962, the book presaged the apocalyptic youth rebellion, capturing the imagination of a generation, and Kesey more than any other figure, including Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary, personifies the anti-authoritarian, acid-tripping counter-culture of yesteryear. The flower children are long gone, but Kesey continues to make news, and any major change in his book would evoke cries of betrayal from the very audience for whom the film was intended. Yet things *have* changed in the ensuing years, both in society at large and in certain psychiatric treatment modalities which play an important role in the story. All these things had to be dealt with, gingerly.

Briefly, *Cuckoo's* plot revolves around R. P. MacMurphy, a free-spirited rogue who feigns insanity at a penal work farm in order to force officials to transfer him to a local asylum. He thinks life will be easier there and, using a felicitous combination of cunning and effrontery, begins to take over the ward to which he's assigned. The patients love him, the authorities don't, and therein lies the tale, which encompasses forced electric shock treatment, lobotomy and death before winding to its tragic finale.

Since the *Cuckoo* project has been thirteen years in the making, a number of important decisions had been made prior to Forman's coming aboard. Jack Nicholson was signed to star as MacMurphy, the Oregon State Hospital would provide a suitable location, and a script existed—the second of two, actually. The first, by Kesey, had

been rejected by the producers as simply reinforcing problematical areas of his book. Kesey refused to have anything to do with the production thereafter.

Forman quickly took the reins into his hands, getting himself to the hospital in Oregon with all due speed. He lived there for several weeks, collaborating on a third draft screenplay with Lawrence Hauben, a young writer who had already been through two drafts on his own. 'I had to do it to clear my head,' Forman said. 'When I agreed to direct the film, I was flooded with psychiatric magazines from well-meaning friends. Finally, I refused them all, because the more I looked into it, the more confused I became. One of the challenges of the story is that you are describing mentally ill people at a time when doctors don't know what mental illness really is.'

'I resolved just to concentrate on the story of a man, and to see with my own eyes the behaviour of the patients. I was practically living with them, and I can tell you how they walk and how they talk, but I do not know what kind of disease they have. I can only define "mental illness" as an incapacity to adjust within normal measure to ever-changing, unspoken rules. If you are incapable of making these constant changes, you are called by your environment crazy. Which of course indicates that mental illness is a social disease. And that's what the book is about: it's a metaphor of society.'

Work on the screenplay continued for months, with Lawrence Hauben eventually superseded by a second writer, Bo Goldman. It's important to remember that Forman was trained at the Czech Film School as a *writer*, not a director. Though his films may look improvised, they are in fact carefully calibrated, and this insistence upon meticulous form has brought him into conflict with several American screenwriters. (There were four

or five on *Taking Off* before he was satisfied.) Forman is the soul of discretion and never acknowledges differences with anybody, but Hauben was more candid. 'There was a definite division in our points of view,' he said. 'I created a warp and woof of time and space, like a trip in a nut house, using contrapuntal sound. Milos didn't want any of that. He was always asking, "But what happens next?" He goes from A to B to C; his main interest is how you get upstairs.'

Believability was the biggest hurdle. Kesey wrote the book under the influence of various drugs, primarily LSD and peyote, and it often spins out into paranoid fantasies that are hilarious or poignant or shattering; but the overall effect, in some instances, is that of a psychedelic cartoon—and not to be endured on film, according to Forman.

The major casualty, in a script which is finally a masterfully precise evocation of Kesey's book, is the giant Indian called Chief Bromden who narrates the story. He is the 'one' of the title who eventually escapes the asylum. If MacMurphy symbolises the rebellious, aggressive side of the American psyche, the Chief is the hurt, vulnerable, terrified aspect—the man who simply stops talking because nobody will listen. The film relegates him to a peripheral role. While that is a sound structural decision (something had to be surrendered to 'get upstairs'), the fate of the Indian remains America's most problematical social issue, and one can't help feeling that it was a mistake to excise virtually all details of the character's personal history.

Forman dismissed the subject impatiently: 'The history of the American Indian is notoriously known. I was bred on "Indianity"—books about Indians. The Chief has the same importance to the film as to the book. We know everything we need to know about this man without entering his brain cells.'

'... Without entering his brain cells,' is an important key to understanding Forman, who has a strong aversion to psychologising or anything that smacks of the confessional. He will not talk about his personal history, which is filled with tragedy. He is not a man who spends much time explaining himself. On the set, he stands away from the centre, quietly puffing a pipe—but watching everything like a cat. He brought the cast to Oregon in advance of filming for extensive improvisational sessions. 'When we first started rehearsing, everything they did was exaggerated. So I sent them upstairs to observe the real lunatics, and many of them selected the most subtle behavioural tics to incorporate into their characterisations. The most touching thing about mental patients is how badly they want to look normal.'

The hospital has only 600 patients (it used to have almost 3,000), so it had been possible to make an entire ward available to the company for both filming and administrative offices. For three months, everyone associated with the production, from co-producers Michael Douglas and Saul Zaentz to property masters and secretaries, literally lived in the hospital during long working hours. I had heard that patients, as well as doctors and aides, were working on the crew, but it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be able to tell them apart. However, within minutes of walking into the ward, I became totally disoriented.

Jack Nicholson was involved in a pool game with a group of unsavoury looking men, all dressed in sloppy white hospital garb. When I said hello, he said 'How's Billy?' and right there reality turned upside down. Later, I learned from Michael Douglas that I bore a striking resemblance to the wife of Billy Redfield, the leading supporting actor, who was ill, but we certainly didn't look like twins, and that was my first awareness of a kind of eerie insularity that pervaded the entire company. Cinematographer Haskell Wexler

'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest': Jack Nicholson as MacMurphy







'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest': Milos Forman (left, behind camera), Jack Nicholson (right), actors and patients

seemed to be flying rather than walking around the corridors, but he did recognise me and asked, 'What are you doing here?' before taking off again. I found Milos Forman upstairs with his editor, Richard Chew, looking a little glazed. Early next morning, I learnt that Haskell Wexler had just been fired because of 'conceptual differences'. (Wexler, whose concern for the misbegotten has been demonstrated in the many political documentaries he has shot and in his feature *Medium Cool*, apparently disliked Forman's overtly comic approach to the material, and couldn't hide his feelings.) He had been Forman's personal choice, and the decision to let him go was clearly painful; he continued on the film until Bill Butler, who also replaced him on *The Conversation*, arrived.

Once the script was set, Forman put his primary energy into working with the actors. He spent a year selecting his supporting cast, finally culling twenty from more than 900 interviewed and 'tested' in make-believe group therapy sessions. 'Each and every one had to be instantaneously identifiable and unique,' he told me, 'but they also had to work as a unit.' I learned later that the ominous looking group surrounding Nicholson at the pool table were seasoned professionals, the lobotomy scars on their skulls put there by an adept make-up artist. But they might as well have been patients, because the *politics* of the situation was little different from that described in Kesey's novel or what I observed while touring the hospital and sitting in on a group therapy session. Jack Nicholson was crown prince of this particular kingdom, and just as his character commandeered the ward, Nicholson took over the film. He cajoled, joked, charmed; he was unfailingly polite and helpful to everyone—but he always got his way. When he would silently withdraw, even in the middle of the room, no one dared to approach him.

From the beginning, Forman had been subjected to certain pressures from the Oregon staff to cosmeticise the view of mental

hospitals depicted by Kesey, and there was objection to a scene—which Forman has retained—of a patient being dragged into the EST room. In fact, Forman's views prevailed in almost all areas relating to the depiction of mental illness and its treatment, but he ran into an almost insurmountable obstacle with the character called 'Big Nurse', the only major female character and the tyrant supreme of the ward. She personifies the misogyny in Kesey's story, and six actresses, including Anne Bancroft and Angela Lansbury, turned the role down flat. The women's movement has effected profound changes in consciousness since Kesey created his monolithic monster, and they wanted no part of it.

Forman thought the actresses were 'misguided': 'I don't believe all the noble efforts of women's lib to put things on an equal basis will ever happen. Look at nature, there's always an inequality, sometimes in favour of one, sometimes the other. Only snails have equality . . . Look, if you have to take stupid orders, it's less humiliating to take them from a man than from a woman. However, there was an exaggeration in Kesey's book which I didn't like, which you can't put on film.' So, for aesthetic reasons, Forman softened the concept—by a hair.

The staff was both relieved and saddened when filming was finally completed, according to Forman. 'I have never experienced actors carrying their roles afterwards as they did on this film,' he said. 'Everyone feels a little lunacy in himself. We were all humbled in confronting these problems.'

BEVERLY WALKER

## Documentary at Fiesole

Flaherty, Grierson, Ivens, Vertov—and consequently documentary films in general—were the subject of this year's annual study convention, attended by (mainly Italian) critics, university teachers and students of film, at Fiesole in July. With temperatures

in the nineties and Fiesole with its Roman theatre and magnificent views over Florence outside, it was remarkable to witness the dedication that kept a large audience firmly in their seats in face of documentaries and talk of documentaries from early morning till late evening for three days.

Three days, of course, were hardly long enough for a subject that diverges in so many different directions. By the last day the demand for debating time exceeded the supply, and films were being projected in two halls simultaneously in order to get through them all. In the debates, where politics loomed largely, Vertov got the best airing. But at the screenings, at least in my estimation, Ivens won hands down. The audience was at a slight disadvantage in that lack of finance had prevented either subtitling or earphone commentaries, and it was Ivens, I think, who most consistently surmounted this barrier of communication. Ivens' career was initially concurrent with the British documentary movement. His *Rain* came out the same year as *Drifters*. His *Spanish Earth* was the year after *Night Mail*. And after that? Well, he was wherever the action happened to be—in China, Russia, the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean, Indonesia, Warsaw, Berlin, Peking, Cuba, Vietnam—and meanwhile he still made films like *Le Mistral* (1965), poetic, evocative, outside the fever of politics but in communication with (debatably) larger forces.

Early British documentaries were received with a respect which sometimes seemed to exceed their deserts. *Drifters*, all forty-eight minutes of it projected yet again in total silence, made one wonder why nobody here ever makes a determined effort to put a few prints in circulation with a music track based on the original score. But the Italians, who hardly ever have the opportunity to see a British documentary (Professor Guido Fink, a specialist on Grierson, admitted to having seen only extracts of British documentaries on television), had no complaints.

'Debates' tended to take the form of individual speeches none of which had much connection with any of the others. A good deal more discussion went on over the long lunches and dinners. 'How did Grierson get those shots of the herring under the sea?' I was asked. 'What were the actual words during the celebrated suburban train sequence in *Pett and Pott*?' 'Were they really non-actors in *The Saving of Bill Blewitt*?' 'Does the Post Office still make films?' A well-informed regret was expressed about the absence of any Jennings films in the programme. Apparently they were too hard to get. But Lindsay Anderson's first documentary, *Wakefield Express*, seemed in this unusual context to have more of Jennings in it than I had realised before.

What is communication? In many ways perspectives were altered, ideas stimulated and a wider grasp of documentary (a word that nobody quite succeeded in defining) achieved by this strange juxtaposition of languages, cultures and images, none of them entirely comprehensible to everybody there. In retrospect, it was not only the students who went home with something to think about. We all did, because documentary, even at its humblest level, shows first and foremost that reality is different according to where and who you are.

ELIZABETH SUSSEX

## Prime Cut

In its broad outlines, the footage missing from the 1958 release version of *Touch of Evil* has never exactly been a secret: after a festival screening of the film in Brussels, Orson Welles described the major deletions to Charles Bitch in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 87. Nor has it ever been assumed that these cuts were nearly as serious as those suffered by *The Magnificent Ambersons*. Nevertheless, it was good to have a chance to see for oneself—an opportunity afforded by the recent appearance in England of the original 107-



minute version, in the Universal season at the NFT and then on the BBC. Fourteen minutes longer than the *Touch of Evil* one knew, it is apparently identical to Welles' final cut except for the credits, which still appear over the opening shot instead of the last.

As luck would have it, this 'definitive' version turned up shortly after the publication of the second half of Stephen Heath's nearly book-length study of the film in the *Summer Screen*. Drawing on the Freudian and semiological disciplines that have been informing most of that magazine's recent work, Heath's consideration of the narrative mechanisms and their psychological implications—undoubtedly the closest reading that the movie has been given in print to date—offers at once a useful preparation to a viewing of the complete cut (through its attentiveness to the plot and 'text' of the shorter version) and a fascinating investigation into methodology.

On the basis of a single look at the new print—weighed against memories of the old version rather than an instant replay for comparison—a few specifics and generalisations can be noted. The most substantial additions, in order, are: (1) A scene between Charlton Heston and Welles just after the latter's first scene with Marlene Dietrich: called away from Tania's by Menzies (Joseph Calleia), Quinlan is confronted by Vargas in front of some oil derricks, lodging a complaint about the treatment of his wife by the Grandis. The first extended dialogue between these rival heroes, it establishes their central conflict with biting directness—Vargas impugning Quinlan's behaviour and attitude as a cop, the latter retaliating with insinuations about Susan Vargas (Janet Leigh) having been 'picked up'.

(2) Vargas sets out with Susan for the motel and a romantic scene ensues; he stops the car and they kiss. A police car pulls up and Menzies gets out to drive Susan the rest of the way so that Vargas can return to the investigation. Menzies explains to Susan how Quinlan wounded his leg by stopping a bullet for him; we see Grandi (Akim Tamiroff) following in another car. Cut to Quinlan, Vargas and Schwartz (Mort Mills) arriving at the construction site (which appears in the shorter version *after* Susan reaches the motel). Then we see Menzies parked in the middle of the highway to apprehend Grandi; a quick fadeout takes us to the arrival at the motel—Grandi asking what he's being charged with, Menzies replying that Quinlan will think of something—and they drive off again, leaving Susan. A crane over the motel shows them receding into the distance, and her subsequent meeting with the 'Night Man' (Dennis Weaver) now runs longer to include some remarks about Grandi, so that Weaver's manic giggles follow Susan's comment, 'He's under arrest.'

(3) Schwartz takes Vargas to

the Hall of Records, noting that he may lose his own job as assistant district attorney before the case is over. (4) Quinlan's second visit to Tania's is somewhat longer, so that Vargas is now briefly seen spotting him from outside, near the oil derricks; and Vargas' preparation of the recording equipment with Menzies is also extended a bit.

Along with several additional continuity shots—including at least two which announce the arrival of Tania in the last scene—these supplements give the narrative a much cleaner fluidity, making both the plot and the physical layout of Los Robles much more legible. The movements of Grandi, the relation of Menzies to Quinlan, the role of Schwartz, and the oil derricks outside Tania's all register in a more integral fashion; and Vargas' sense of ethics—including compunction about the final trap he sets for Quinlan—is given further attention, justifying Welles' 1958 remark that the 'moral' scenes were reduced while the violent ones were left intact. Otherwise, the sound-mix is rather more complex and one has the added benefit of seeing more of all the central characters: all in all, a happy bonus demonstrating that the most densely plotted of Welles' films is a lot more lucid than one had formerly supposed.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

## Whose Justice?

Three years ago, Marcel Ophuls (renowned for his French documentary *The Sorrow and the Pity* and the less known study of the Irish conflict, *A Sense of Loss*) made an agreement with the BBC, the German production company Polytel International and the British company VPS, to make a film on the Nuremberg Trials and their application to subsequent events. Called *The Memory of Justice*, it was to be in two parts (totalling about 4½ hours running time), beginning with an exploration of the impact of the Trials on the German conscience and going on to examine how the legal and moral principles established might be seen in relation to events in Hiroshima, Algiers and particularly Vietnam. It was intended to be a personal investigation into a variety of moral truths (and untruths), interweaving interviews, actuality material and specially shot sequences in a leisurely, detailed discourse, with the viewer being slowly drawn into the discoveries and on-going debates of the director/interviewer.

The short sequence I saw as M. Ophuls was doing his final mixing recently in London immediately recalled the kind of narrative connections made in his earlier films: a German woman doctor being questioned at the Trials followed by a conversation between Ophuls and his family in which his wife laughingly suggests that it might be more pleasant if he made musicals like *My Fair Lady*. Cut

to a long car journey through Germany obligingly accompanied by a selection from *The Band Wagon*, followed by Ophuls' own tart comments about the way German leaders found nice places to live in the most beautiful surroundings...

Trouble over the film began when VPS told Ophuls that the finished work was too long and personal and rambling and not dynamic enough; some BBC officials apparently objected to scenes of frontal nudity (and others professed to find the film simply boring), and a final row developed which resulted in Ophuls leaving the picture, somewhat unsure of what his next move should be. VPS and the BBC then brought in Lutz Becker (director of *The Double-Headed Eagle* and co-writer of *Swastika*, also made for VPS) to reshape Ophuls' original into something closer to their wishes and to give it sharper definition—Ophuls, as producer-director, had complete control over the material during production but no right of final cut. Earlier this year, a close colleague got hold of the duplicate cutting copy of Ophuls' long version (nearly five hours) and sent it to America where Ophuls was teaching at Princeton. Having now got possession of his print again, Ophuls rallied the American press, showed the film to some critics and leading figures in the arts and received rave reviews.

Ophuls now clearly sees himself in the middle of a personal crusade to save his original conception. 'You know, the promoters of this kind of film feel that they can stipulate form and content simply because they are promoters. This conflict of interest can cost people their careers. In my case, an even graver conflict is raised by the unwillingness of promoters to accord a state of authorship to "documentary films"; it is a generally mediocre genre, admittedly, and their natural sense of interference is reinforced by the fact that, for them, this is just "compilation" material and not a director's own work. I am trying to establish that it is possible to use these materials to make a totally personal statement which will take the documentary film out of its ghetto of self-satisfied pseudo-sermonising.' Regarding the Becker version, his main fear was that it would take the edge off the confrontation with Germany then and now and would 'flatter German opinion'.

When I spoke to Lutz Becker, he was equally adamant that his 3½-hour version would not change Ophuls' political and historical views. 'I was called in when he had abandoned his project (shamefully, in my opinion) after the row with the producers; my attitude was one of professional responsibility towards the subject matter both as a German and as a filmmaker. I am on the side of the creative person. Although I concede that *The Sorrow and the Pity* can be placed in the camp of the *cinéma d'auteur*, *The Memory of*

*Justice* as I found it in the five hours presented to me, appeared unclear in its concepts and definitions and did not fully connect with the vastness of its problems. I feel I have sharpened, not softened, the political arguments by taking out self-indulgent sequences and others which might make it confusing to present to a television audience.'

The latest news is that American Paramount have now backed the film and offered a worldwide distribution guarantee and that the BBC's Aubrey Singer, having seen the picture in New York, has apparently reversed the BBC's earlier views and indicated that Ophuls' version would be shown. It seems certain, however, that German TV (ZDF), having compared both versions, will present Becker's cut on their channels.

So—the matter will have to rest there until we have a chance to see one or both versions. In any event, this controversy, which has caused so much pain and heart-break to several people, seems likely to clinch the case for recognition of the compilation film as an autonomous work of art, worthy of being cherished, debated over and, above all, respected.

JOHN GILLET

## Annecy

'Never again,' swore the usually imperturbable Jimmy Murakami, cancelling arrangements to serve on other festival juries after his first jury experience at Annecy 75. Last year the animation festival at Zagreb handed the Grand Prix to a Zagreb cartoon. This year Annecy gave it to France. Next year, when the festival should be at Mamaia, anticipate a triumph for Rumania...

Annecy's odd pre-selection and awards were matched by the multi-lingual pomposity of ASIFA politics. One attractive explanation of the Grand Prix winner, Piotr Kamler's *Le Pas*, was that its cube of paper floating leaf by leaf across screen to reform its original shape was a symbolic account of a recent ASIFA voting paper scandal, animation's own Watergate. Sadly, *Le Pas* intended no more than 'the poetic stripping of a variable geometry,' declared the director. It certainly fulfilled the fashionable French determination that animation must eschew entertainment and offer only tedious, pretentious self-indulgence.

The awards had other festival directors threatening two parallel screenings: 'The Best of Annecy' and 'The Prizewinners of Annecy'. Even a third might be possible—'The Unshown of Annecy', for Kuri's two latest and a new Dunning production were not only rejected as entries but were not even shown in the out of competition sessions. One of the all-French pre-selectors did admit to a blunder when the most ecstatic reception went to the rejected *Way Out*, a hilarious comedy of attempted suicide from a Stan



Hayward script by the young English animator Ted Rockley (who has quietly made a dozen films in the past eighteen months). 'None of us laughed,' muttered the pre-selector.

Other British delights were as unexpected as *Way Out*. Alison de Vere, a Wyatt-Cattaneo animator, won the only British prize for *Café Bar*, a dazzling sex war skirmish which extends a café table into a limitless battlefield where a pilot nose-dives into his lady's hat to hack his way through the foliage.

Thalma Goldman, whose *Green Man Yellow Woman* showed a tough intelligence at work last year, contributed *Amateur Night*. Three appalling amateur strippers are ingratiatingly introduced to a monstrous audience based, confided Ms Goldman, on a ferocious Women's Lib forum at the NFT. A gruesomely ribald track accompanies hideously precise animation; and the result is an alarmingly deft kick in the ambisextrous crotch. (Bob Godfrey, refusing Ms Goldman a job, declared, 'You've got to draw worse than me to work here, not better . . .'). Clive Pallant's equally fierce contribution to anti-erotica, *The Castaway*, threw a new light on women as objects when his hero lashed three pneumatic women together to make a life-saving raft. Pallant, a Central School of Art and Design student, seems no less dauntingly talented than Rowland Wilson, whose Pushkin Vodka commercial for Richard Williams' studio had the audience awestruck.

Terry Gilliam's *Miracle of Flight* engagingly traces man's conquest of the air until the present day when a Pan-Am ticket apparently gets one booted off the edge of a cliff. *Bigger Is Better*, by the inexhaustible Derek Phillips, showed progress from cottage to city congestion with feverish energy and flair.

By common consent it was Britain's Anney. (An award to America for the best national selection had the Americans frantically trying to recall what on earth America had shown.) Bob Godfrey's long-awaited *Great*, shown out of competition, proved a half-hour wonder, improbably turning the life and times of the Victorian engineer Brunel into an enormously funny musical homage which simultaneously salutes every animation hero from Len Lye to Popeye. The whole magnificent shambles is made even more irresistible by Jonathan Hedges' infectious music. The result is animation's most joyful triumph since *Yellow Submarine*.

DEREK HILL

## Working Party

Harold Wilson, it could be said, has a special relationship with the British film industry. It was during Mr. Wilson's years at the Board of Trade (1947-1951) that the industry faced the most severe of its immediate post-war crises; that the 1948 Cinematograph Films



Pasolini directing his new film, 'The 120 Days of the City of Sodom'. In August it was reported that the negative had been kidnapped, along with others in Italy. Photograph: Deborah Beer

Act was passed; and that two of the key support measures, the National Film Finance Corporation and the Eady Fund, came into operation. Reviewing the PEP Report on the film industry in *SIGHT AND SOUND* in 1952, Mr. Wilson said that 'No foreseeable change in the structure of the industry, or in its methods of protection against imported products, will remove the need for a continuation of both the Eady Plan and the NFFC, in some form or another, long after 1954.'

More than twenty years later, Eady and the NFFC are of course still with us, British production is in the doldrums, and a despondent industry is once again pinning a faint hope on Mr. Wilson's known interest and his ability to produce rabbits out of hats. In May, a group of film industry people dined at No. 10, the occasion being described by some as 'essentially a social function' and by others as 'a working dinner' and 'certainly not a social function'. Less than three months later, in August, the Prime Minister set up a working party to consider 'the requirements of a viable and prosperous British film industry over the next decade.'

The chairman of the working party is Mr. John Terry, managing director of the NFFC, and its fourteen members include Richard Attenborough, Sir Bernard Delfont (the impresario who won't show *Hennessy* in his cinemas), Carl Foreman, Sir John Woolf, Michael Deeley (producer of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), Alan Sapper of the ACTT, Lord Brabourne and Lord Ryder. The appointment which seems to have attracted most attention is that of Lady Falkender, who says that she sees a lot of movies, and whose function has been variously interpreted as representing Downing Street, representing the ordinary filmgoer (and a

more speculative press conjecture) as a trial run for a possible appointment as Arts Minister in the Lords. It has been suggested in the trade press that the working party is too large to be effective; and that it's too small to represent all the industry interests. It is, however, you look at it, distinctly an establishment grouping.

It's significant that the Working Party has been set up by the Prime Minister himself, and that it is expected to produce its report quickly—within, certainly, a matter of months. It has been asked to consider the scale of production 'in the light of markets at home and abroad both in cinema and on television, and bearing in mind future technological developments' and 'the desirability of a closer integration between the cinematograph and television industries.' It will also be looking into the problem of financial needs, and 'the relationship of the industry with its sources of finance and the relations between the industry and the Government.'

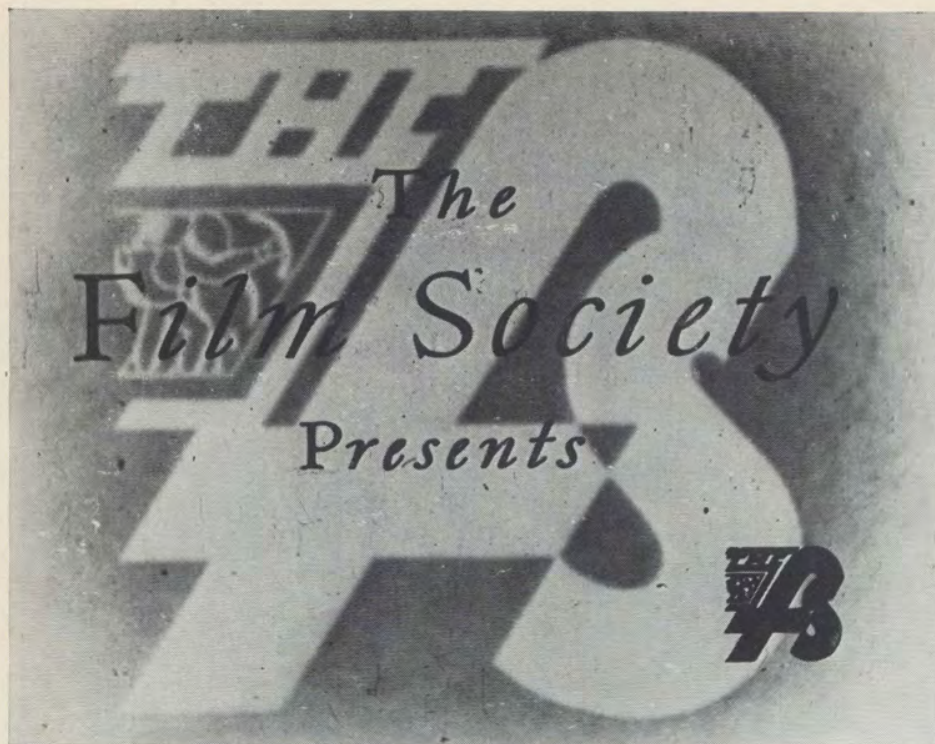
The terms of reference are broad enough for the enquiry to take in a lot of territory; the requirement to report quickly suggests that in practice it will have to concentrate its attentions. Already, the Government has accepted in principle the Cinematograph Film Council's recommendation that up to £200,000 per annum should be reserved for a two-year period from the Eady Fund, as 'seed' money to encourage the development of scripts, pre-production work, etc. This fund is expected to be administered by the NFFC, with projects being chosen by representatives of the producers, writers and film unions. Small though the sum is, it could help to prize open one of the more notorious log-jam points in a dammed up industry.

But the basic problem remains that of where the money for production is to come from. Suggestions of a golden egg around the corner in the form of a levy on TV companies have met with predictably forceful protests from the television interests; but the interdependence of the two industries is a fact, and no doubt the working party will be looking at the kind of relationships worked out by some of our EEC partners. Presumably Lord Annan will be giving some attention to the same problems from the other side of the fence. Among the members of the working party are Brian Tesler (LWT) and Alasdair Milne (BBC); and their involvement in what is basically a film industry enquiry is a realistic move, a recognition that they are all together in moving pictures.

And there is the question of relations with the Government. The PEP Report of 1952 concluded: 'If the public considers it desirable for political, cultural or economic reasons that British films should be produced, then it must be prepared for the Government not only to protect the industry indefinitely, but also to aid it financially for as far ahead as can be seen.' This depressingly accurate forecast remains unchanged, although it may be that the Eady Fund and the NFFC are due for an overhaul. A difference is that the public in 1952, with recent memories of the British cinema's wartime role, were probably more ready to accept unquestioningly the desirability of British films being produced. The industry has got into its present state of drift, going nowhere and seemingly with nowhere to go, partly because the public has allowed it to do so.

PENELOPE HOUSTON





Title card for the Film Society, designed by E. McKnight Kauffer

# OLD MAN'S MUMBLE

## Reflections on a semi- centenary

Ivor Montagu

**'The Film Society itself, whose importance can scarcely be over-estimated, was formed in London in 1925.'**—Rachael Low: *The History of the British Film, 1918-1929*.

Fifty years ago. A long time. Those who ask me to remember risk getting the same old man's mumble they would get from the yokel in a B-picture, complete with smock, churchwarden and pint of wallop. Start with putting straight two errors. First, that though the nowadays and invaluable 700-strong Federation of Film Societies has done us the honour to choose us as an ancestor, a different age and different circumstances made us something quite different (as will presently appear). Second, we are not, and never were, 'The London Film Society'. This misnomer, together with several grievous errors there and in the introduction, appears on the title-page of the unauthorised facsimile reproduction of our programmes, issued in USA.<sup>1</sup> That name belonged to the local London member society of the Federation, organised by Olwen Vaughan after World War II, when we had been some time dead. Like my friend Joe Beckett, the boxer, who brought an action against a newspaper for libelling him by calling him 'the undisputed champion' when he was in fact 'The Champion' *tout court*, we, in our day, were 'The Film Society', the first, the only then, and nothing else.

The start was simple. It arose from a conversation in the corridor of a train. The actor Hugh Miller and I were on our way back from Germany: I an excessively brash and self-confident young man of 20, newly down from Cambridge where I had just scraped a degree and returning from a commission to write something about the German film industry for *The Times* (in the end I got cold feet and never did); and Hugh, fresh from doing a film in Munich. We simultaneously hit on the same idea: 'Why not a Film Society for the cinema just as there is a Stage Society for plays?' Hugh Miller took me to Adrian Brunel. Adrian to Iris Barry. Iris gave a select party at her flat. Sidney Bernstein came. And Frank Dobson, the sculptor. And Walter Mycroft of the *Evening Standard*. Everybody thought it a capital idea. Eureka! The egg of Columbus! And that was the first cabal of the affair.

For those born yesterday—explain the Stage Society. This was a respected institution that acted, for the theatre, as try-out and safety valve. Plays, native or foreign, that did not appeal to managers as commercial, or might court the ban of the Lord Chamberlain, could be given single performances by such bodies in private, the members—drawn from both sides of the curtain—paying for the theatre and the scenery, the casts performing merely for the challenge offered by the roles. Of course there were duds in the selection, but glittering star-shells too. Thus, in their day, Ibsen was so launched in Britain and Shaw upon the world. Lo! The stone that the builder rejected could by this means become the keystone of the corner. Why not for cinema too?

We issued a prospectus: 'The Film Society has been founded in the belief that there are in this country a large number of people who regard the cinema with the liveliest interest, and who would welcome an opportunity seldom afforded the general public of witnessing films of intrinsic merit, whether new or old . . . It is felt to be of the utmost importance that films of the type proposed should be available to the Press, and to the film trade itself, including present and (what is more important) future British film producers, editors, cameramen, titling experts and actors . . . It is important that films of this type should not only be shown under the best conditions to the most actively minded people both inside and outside the film world, but that they should, from time to time, be revived. This will be done. In this way standards of taste and of executive ability may be raised and a critical tradition established. This cannot but affect future production . . .'

In our naiveté it did not occur to us that this was perhaps what some people would be afraid of. In unexpected quarters we met not welcoming arms, but clenched fists. We had a battle on our hands. Consider the period 1924-25. *Caligari* was known. And Chaplin, thanks be. But *Mother* and *Potemkin* were still on the drawing-board. And talkies in the womb of time—adequate inventions, of course, had long been

<sup>1</sup>The Film Society Programmes 1925-1939, Arno Press, New York, 1972.



available but were undeveloped. The invaluable Rachael Low cites from a *Bioscope* article in the early Twenties the following opinions of the cinema. Gordon Craig: 'Smears all it touches. Enslaves the mind of the people. Rules the people as in ancient days a degenerate Church ruled them. Is the brat of yellow journalism.' General Booth of the Salvation Army: '... most disgusting and absolutely unfit for public exhibition.' John Drinkwater: '... has no existence at all as art.'

Ah, there was the rub. Theatre—that had a history of millennia from Aeschylus and centuries from Shakespeare. But cinema—who but a premature beatnik or an egghead could possibly believe in it? I myself recall the censor saying to me, when I expostulated diffidently about cuts in *Caligari*: 'Don't pretend that anybody ever put anything in a film unless in the hope of making money.'

Remember that there were in the whole world in those days no Film Institutes, no Film Archives, no Oscars, no Film Festivals, no film schools (except one in USSR and no one outside knew of it then); no really functioning educational cinema, scientific research cinema, historical record cinema, even advertising cinema; no 'specialised' cinema theatres (except the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier in Paris, which I went to see before we got going); practically no serious writing on cinema except the very early Vachel Lindsay and Gilbert Seldes' essay on Chaplin in *The Seven Lively Arts*.<sup>2</sup> There was practically no serious criticism or regular film reporting in the 'quality' newspapers or weeklies. Film gossip, film news, film fan papers run anonymously by the production companies themselves a-plenty. The *Spectator* had just started an innovative column with Iris Barry. *Times* mentions were strictly occasional, Lejeune afar off—with the *Manchester Guardian*. To emphasise the paucity of film buff nourishment, I need only recall that it fell to my lot—a good deal later—to be the first film critic on three publications in turn: the *Observer*, the *Weekend Review* and the *New Statesman*.

Film an art? The idea trod on many corns. The authorities didn't like it. The censors didn't like it. Above all, the trade mistrusted it. In expecting otherwise we had made three ignorant mistakes. First we discovered that whereas what was regulated in the theatre was public performance, so that a private performance could escape the Sunday prohibition, and escape submission of the play text to the Lord Chamberlain, cinema enjoyed no such freedom. Regulations on film, based on the accident of judge interpretation of a law introduced in 1911 by the then Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, to protect audiences against fire, then placed under local authority control every sort of cinema performance, private society equally with any other.

To exist at all, we had first to secure leave to breathe from the London County Council: to use a cinema when it was closed to the public by rule, that is, on a Sunday afternoon; and to be exempt from censorship—for two reasons—first, and itself decisive,

<sup>2</sup>Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture*, 1916, and Seldes, 1924—both well known to, and very much influencing, us.



'Waxworks': the main feature in the first programme of the Film Society, at the New Gallery on October 25th, 1925

because the whole purpose of exploring for study all the avenues available to film expression would have been negated if we could only show what was considered appropriate for public performance (and this, as the trade-appointed British Board of Film Censors explained to us, was the only criterion they could use); secondly, though incidental, because censor fees calculated on a fair price for a film to be commercially used would have been a crushing burden for single performances. Our claims, of course, aroused all manner of suspicion.<sup>3</sup> Nearly strangled before birth, we refused to compromise and emerged narrowly from the LCC examination. I forget the exact split but around a hundred members voting gave us a majority by a single figure. This was our first battle.

No orgies followed. Although the films of our opening season did as a matter of fact

include one pioneer nude—a highly discreet one, a lateral view in the dark obscured by superimposition and lasting about two seconds—in *Ménilmontant*. (I will admit, however, that the appearance secured the actress an engagement a few weeks later for a British film, of course of a highly respectable, family nature.)

Second, we had expected that, on the precedent of the Lord Chamberlain and the Stage Society, the Board of Film Censors would at least tolerate, if not welcome, our activities as a lightning conductor, diverting the wrath of the literate from laws felt necessary to be applied to the commonalty. Wrong again. Somehow the film censors of those days seemed to look on us jealously as derogating from their majesty, a seditious device intended to undermine. They had it in for us and for a time looked coldly on anything odd that might reach them after passing through our hands. I still have the famous red rejection slip with which they refused Germaine Dulac's surrealist *La Coquille et le Clergyman*: 'This film is so obscure as to be almost meaningless. If it has any meaning this is doubtless an objectionable one.' (They were probably right.) However, we hit back with Len Lye's *Tusalava*. They demanded an explanation, of both content and name. Len elucidated:

<sup>3</sup>Suspicion seems inherent in elected bodies, especially local ones. Much later, a provincial film society, permitted by its local authority to function provided it submitted beforehand a list of projected programmes, received only one demur: what was the nature of a film proposed called *In der Nacht*? It was explained that this was a Ruttmann rendering of a musical composition of that name by Schumann.



'The film shows a self-shape annihilating an antagonistic element. And *Tusalava* is a Polynesian word meaning "In the end everything is just the same". That silenced 'em.

Third, our biggest error. We had thought our efforts bound to be complementary, and so certainly of assistance, to the trade. Opportunity for acquaintance with novel techniques, unknown directors, even new stars, recruitment of talent or sympathy for film-going in hitherto reluctant circles, disclosure of audience favour for a property on which they might be hesitating to take a risk, attraction of new audience potential to flow ultimately into their own box-office. All these we offered gratis, mobilised by our labour and at our expense, not costing them a penny. But no way. Trade journals, exhibitors and renters' associations tended to treat us as dangerous busybodies, trespassing upon mysteries of their exclusive province, interlopers whose very pretensions implied a criticism—did it not suggest that there could be, even was,

we would give it back to its owners, exactly as it had been transformed. It could be no disadvantage to have such a copy already in England, backed possibly by press publicity helpful—if the picture warranted—to a sale. And for all this we should charge nothing, ask no commission. (We were, of course, legally registered as 'not for profit'.) But can you imagine, in the film ambience of that era, any line more likely to convince those we approached that we must be crooks or simpletons? No one could be that disinterested. Our patter must be deceit. It took years before our dealings convinced the incredulous. But, in the end, they did. Our shows even became a sought-after accolade.

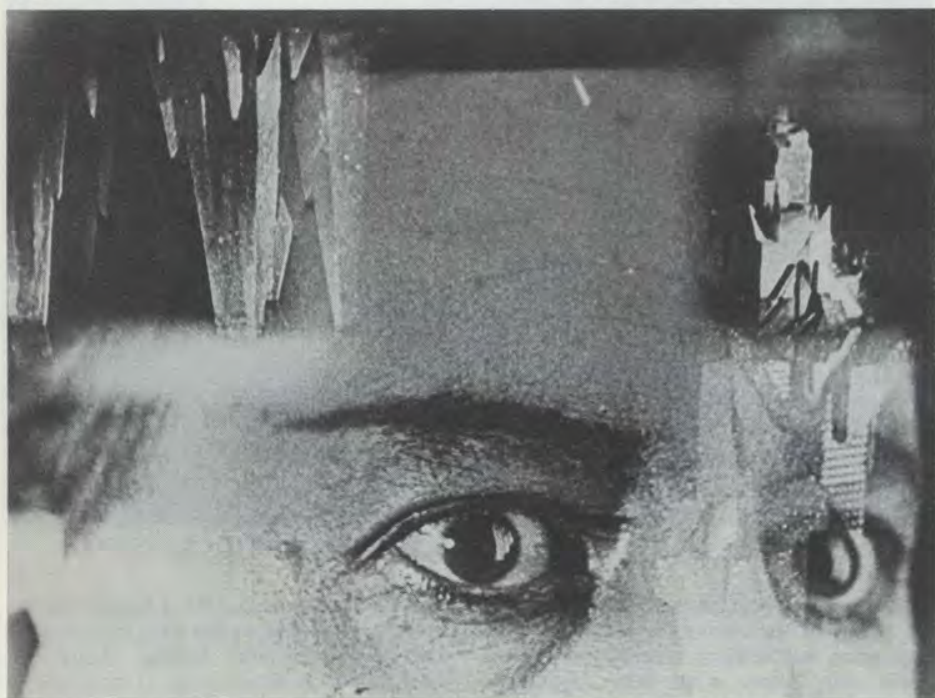
The press was mixed. Mycroft and Iris were with us, of us. Believing, faithful under stress, invaluable. Other journalists of that day, warm, understanding, helpful, were Pat Mannock of the *Herald*, Jympson Harman of the *Evening News*, Ernest Betts. I remember them at our very first press conference, given in my father's library. But

(I mention no names, I bear no malice). According to this revelation I had returned from USSR with subversive films for our Society, successfully smuggled through the customs. How? I must have access to the diplomatic bag. This tale was the more galling because I *had* tried to get Russian films, entirely above-board of course, but received a dusty answer. (All the Soviet officials of that day and age would say was an uncomprehending 'We are here only to buy and sell,' and it was not until our fourth season that we managed to extract any.) The newspaper's apology, after service of a libel writ by my colleagues, was categorical enough.

It may be asked: if, indeed, we encountered such obstacles, how did the enterprise succeed? The obstacles are certainly not figments of a jaundiced recollection. They were real enough. Brunel writes in his autobiography *Nice Work* that he ceased to be a member of the Film Society Council 'as my employer insisted that my association with the Society would damage the prestige of the films I made for them. The campaign in some Press circles suggested that we were an evil influence, as well as being half-witted.' This is quite true. Formally he had to get out even before our first season was finished. He never ceased to help us invaluablely behind the scenes. In the early years the editing was always done from his tiny upstairs premises in Dansey Yard (afterwards Brunel and Montagu), just opposite the greenhouse where the one-time famous arrest of the muscular parson took place after the unsavoury incident with the small boy.<sup>4</sup> But the open association had to stop. He ran scared, and quite right too. His career was at risk. The rest of us, fortunately, were less vulnerable, and with us the only thing that rankled was the harped-on ploy making us out to be some sort of 'intellectuals' (maybe this hurt because it was true), but the worst sort—not only intellectuals but, especially, intellectual snobs. This was to misrepresent our entire platform. In spite of any appearance to the contrary—inevitable because of our function of concerning ourselves with the films that other means and agencies neglected—we stood firmly not for esotericism but for catholicism. We wanted ourselves and others to be able not to prefer *these* films, but to choose among *all* sorts of films, including these. We would never have started the Film Society if we had not been fans of the flea-pits and picture palaces too.

The answer is simple and cannot be doubted. Success was achieved not because there was no opposition, nor arising from our personal deserts or merits, but as ever with success because of the backing we received from others, which itself was forthcoming because the time was ripe.

The very vehemence of disdain of cinema, rife inside, among its practitioners, as well as outside, the rejection of its claims as art, the absence of self-study and research of 'how'—all so patently outdated by masterpieces already beginning to flow and possibilities beginning to be realised—began just at that moment to breed its opposite. Study film history. Just at that



'La Coquille et le Clergyman', shown in 1930. '... if it has any meaning this is doubtless an objectionable one.'

product of merit that their own existing methods failed to bring to light?

Nor had the censor been alone in taking it for granted that no one could be engaged in cinema unless he was on the make. Those who seemed most firmly to believe this were those who particularly stood to gain from our activities; i.e. the owners abroad of quality films the trade in the UK so far would not take. Imagine our approach to these characters. We would start off by saying—what else could we say, since it was true—that *we did not want their films unless they could not possibly persuade anyone else in Britain to put them on.* (Of what use to waste our energies and clutter our shows with anything our audiences could see elsewhere?) We would (could) not afford to pay a penny piece for the films. We would, however, pay duty on a copy, prepare and title it in English with the finest skill available, show it to an audience in the best of cinemas with a full-size orchestra and appropriate score. Afterwards

others were less encouraging. Lejeune, strangely enough, was the sole out-and-out frank opponent. No scheme was worth supporting, she declared, that did not immediately and directly attain the public. A private society was but a coterie. She would never review a film that had not been publicly shown. In the short run, of course, so far as it went, the principle of her objection was sound enough. But it took no account of the problem *at that time*; and, in the long run, the Society's contribution by example to what she wanted was not small.

Some journalists taught us worldly wisdom: one, pretending to support us, talked to me before I left that last pre-F.S. season summer on a British Museum zoological expedition to USSR. 'You must get Soviet films,' he urged. 'French and German are old hat. To be any good your Society must show Russian stuff.' I came back with my skinned, bottled and otherwise preserved mice to be greeted by a display article in his mass-circulation newspaper

<sup>4</sup>This greenhouse was the reason for design of our B. and M. tie, open to all our technical helpers, green with thin yellow diagonal stripes.



moment masterpieces of experiment were beginning in not one centre but many, the books were starting to be written and diversification was spreading into many genres. We did not cause this, we were not responsible for it—of course—but we functioned as a focus, we were *part of it*. The old—who had grown used to cinema barrenness—could delight in what we were doing; the young could grow up with the new developments and win their spurs. That was why, in Rachael Low's words, the Film Society was 'important'. We slaked a thirst.

The response outside the industry when we asked for £1 share guarantors to help launch us was immediate. I cull from fragments of memory GBS,<sup>5</sup> Wells, Huxley, Haldane, Keynes, Roger Fry, Lord David Cecil, Augustus John, H. F. Rubinstein, Anthony Asquith, Edith Craig, Ellen Terry, St. Loe Strachey, Lord Ashfield and my father. No one from our extensive acquaintance returned a refusal. Our Sundays became so fashionable we had to transfer after a few seasons from the New Gallery to the Tivoli, from a cinema holding 1,400 to one accommodating between two and three thousand. But this kind of support was important mainly to overcome the resistance of establishment and press. What was no less noticeable was the current that gave us courage from *inside* cinema: George Pearson was a spontaneous backer from the start. Support came too from most of the participants of the old Hate Club, an informal gathering of show-biz friends who used to assemble after important film first nights to natter about all they disliked and hoped to better, e.g. Mick and Aileen Balcon, Miles Mander and Henry Harris, Sasha and Leila Stewart, Wilcox and Victor Saville occasionally, Vivian Van Damm. The list of those deservedly thanked for helping us find films is given at the bottom of the back of each season's last programme and too long to quote: here I will mention only the Bromheads of Gaumont British, the great collector A. Pearl Cross, numerous friends among small importers and two continental experts, Heinrich Fraenkel and Dr. Boehm.

'Blind 'em with science,' the old soldier advised the new recruit about to face a court-martial. I shall obey by introducing a few statistics. Between 1925 and 1939, in those fourteen seasons, we gave 108 performances showing about 500 films: about 263 silents and 237 sound. In the first five seasons all films (except a special experiment) were silents. After the fifth the proportion of synchronised gradually grew substantial. After the tenth the little letter 's' that used to signify the novelty 'sound film' against a name in the programme summary begins instead to signify the exception 'silent', and there are only five more of these. Incidentally, for the silents we always employed full orchestra and special compositions as well as special arrangements of music; we also tried noises and (for special shorts) complete silence.

Of this number, 312 (111 features, 201 shorts) had not hitherto been shown in

<sup>5</sup>Shaw's weekends in Ayot St. Lawrence were an inflexible habit. So he used to drop into the cutting rooms, and we ran films specially in the projection theatre for him.



Poster for 'Waxworks'; title card for 'The Lodger' by McKnight Kauffer, who came into films by way of the Film Society

Britain. 11 features and 26 shorts consisted of specially arranged extracts, assembled to illustrate particular technical aspects, e.g. trick-work, colour systems, the principles of various sound systems, the use of close-ups, Hitchcock's direction in sound and silent compared, treatment of the same sequence in silent and sound versions of *The Informer* contrasted, etc. Three features (*Caligari*, *Potemkin* and I can't remember the third) were shown in their entirety only by us. Two films, *Jerusalem* and *Mabuse*, issued as two separate massive parts each, were each shown in combination as a whole. Revivals numbered a further 9 features and 137 shorts.

A point about the shorts revivals. These, including two Méliès, three one-reel Griffith's 'Entr'acte', shown in 1926 and the occasion of the Film Society's only riot



fiths, three one-reel Pickfords, ten Chaplins, a Keaton, a Linder, a Bunny and Flora Finch, etc., were shown partly to recall the work and appearance of early famous players and masters, but otherwise—I fear—as grotesques. They dated from 1897 to anywhere in the 20th century teens. It emphasises the significance in film history of our operating period—so rich for the art in expressive development—that most films made up to only six years before we began could already appear primitive and grotesque.

Of feature revivals I will note only *Greed*, *The Marriage Circle* and *Tillie's Punctured Romance*. We were the first to show films including work for cinema by such composers as Britten, Honegger, Shostakovich, and such poets as Brecht and Auden, and a whole animated feature drawn by Franz Masereel; to draw into cinema McKnight Kauffer and Edmund Dulac. We were first in Britain to show the work of such as Leni, Berger, Wiene, Czinner (with Bergner of course), L'Herbier, Pick, Pabst, Reiniger, Renoir, Ruttmann, Clair, Molander, Pudovkin, Cavalcanti, Grierson, Kozintsev, both Trauberg brothers, Dovzhenko, Dreyer, Dziga Vertov, Vigo, Wright, Dudow, Pagnol, Guitry, Romm, Elton, Legg, Anstey, Ivens and Lye. We were the first to show anything Japanese. We specially sought out the few pioneer women directors. We showed—when these films were neglected—Sagan's *Mädchen in Uniform* and Machaty's *Ekstase*. Also, complete, four Eisenstein pictures not shown again in Britain unless on 16mm. or years later. (I may have slipped up on a few of these priorities—the GPO/EMB films exclude their own viewings, of course—but very few.)

We were the first to hold a public exhibition of set designs (Leni), a public discussion of a feature (after *Mother*), a lecture on practice (Pudovkin's paper 'Doing Without Actors') and an instructional course on theory (Eisenstein's, attended by a scintillating array of current and future British directors and technicians).

Perhaps it is time to own up exactly who 'we' were. Our Council: 1925, Barry, Bernstein, Dobson, Miller, Mycroft and I.M. In 1926 Miller went off to America, Kauffer replaced him. Edmund Dulac followed in 1927 and Professor Jack Isaacs in 1929. In 1931 there was a new wave, itself partly the product of interest raised earlier by membership: Asquith, Grierson, Nancy Samuel (daughter of Herbert) and Ellen Wilkinson. Thorold Dickinson came on in 1932. Miss J. M. Harvey, the sweet, gentle and proficient secretary around whom all had revolved since inception, retired as such and joined the Council in 1935 (alas, died in 1937). The last wave, 1936, was Elsie Cohen (who preceded Hoellering at the Academy Cinema, with Miss Harvey's help), Sidney Cole, Robert Herring (of *Close-Up*) and Basil Wright. Our solicitor throughout was Walter Hart, who devised us an accident-proof constitution enabling us to do anything, including sell soda water.

The technical preparation of programmes in the first five seasons was done from Brunel's cutting-rooms, with the aid of Tod Rich, Jock Orton, Ian Dalrymple, Michael Hankinson, Angus Macphail, Sergei Nol-



## Extra list for Statisticophiles\*

During our first five seasons films were separated in listing according to whether they had been shown only by the Society or whether they were only currently unavailable or perhaps not in that form. By countries of origin: France 38 (31.7), Germany 36 (28.8), USA 41 (10.31), Great Britain 45 (4.41). The rest were Japan 3 (3.0), USSR 3 (2.1), early Russian 2 (2.0), Swedish 2 (2.0), Belgian 2 (1.1), Indian 1 (1.0), Swiss 1 (0.1). These figures show, what should be obvious and was unavoidable, that British and US items, with so many channels of access to the public, had less need of premières from us. Later on the 'exclusives' were not separated: the full totals for the fourteen seasons are 115 Great Britain, 101 France, 100 Germany, 79 USA, 37 USSR (plus 4 early Russian), 10 Netherlands; 5 each from Italy, Poland, Sweden and unidentified; 4 each from Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Japan; 3 Switzerland; 2 China, Hungary, Spain and South Africa; 1 India, Mexico, Portugal. This was the fulfilment of our promised role to enable study of work from varied sources.

By categories (excluding the features) the figures would go something like: 'Primitives' (before 1920) 63; Comedies (including 10 Chaplins, 5 Brunels and 5 Benchleys) 40; Biology (18 Secrets of Nature, particularly those showing slowed-motion or speeded-up material, but also research films) 28; other sciences (including research in physics and demonstration in mathematics) 16; Graphic Arts and Architecture 9; Music (including experiments in types of musical accompaniment and hand-drawn sound—the earliest of these, interestingly enough, was not by anyone you would expect, Fischinger or Norman McLaren or any of the recognised pioneers but, dated 1930, by U.B. Iwerks, Disney's craftsman) 14; Puppets (including one from 1912, Starevichs and early Pals) 11; Silhouettes (including 15 Reinigers) 19; Cartoons (including 17 Disneys) 37; Experimental in Narrative (including some with paper backgrounds) 14; Experimental in Film Technique and Research, 26; 'Absolute' (a genre pilloried as absurd when shown in our first season but since used much in advertising; it included work by Eggeling, Ruttmann, Hans Richter and Lye) 14; 'Abstract' (largely a French style, used by such artists as Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Duchamp, Deslaw, Bruguère) 10; Surrealist (including Clair, Richter and Cocteau) 4; Exterior compositions (including Ivens' *Rain* and *The Bridge*) 10; and of more humdrum categories—Education 8; Sports 9; Travel, etc. 25; Historical Records 18; 'Sociology' (many E.M.B. and G.P.O. films would fall in here) 30; Advertising 29. I bother you with this data simply to prove the implementation of our promise to explore diversification and potentialities.

bandov, eventually the B. and M. third partner, Frank Wells. The sixth and seventh were done by Thorold Dickinson, with help from Dallas Bower; the eighth by Bower and Sidney Cole; the ninth, tenth and eleventh by Cole and Ray Pitt; the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth by Pitt with help from Bert Marshall, John Monck and Bill Megarry. All the laboratory work from the first to the last programme was done by the aces of Studio Film Labs, which started in a single ground floor lab on the same staircase as B. and M. The famous programme notes were written by those responsible for technical presentation: the present writer wrote those of the first four seasons and some particular notes later; most of those of the later seasons were written by Thorold Dickinson or Sidney Cole, a few by Jack Isaacs. (It is quite false, as the writer of the introduction to the unauthorised US reprint assumes, supposedly on the basis of internal evidence, that they were written by Iris Barry. Iris never wrote any.)

These names are imposed upon you for a very good reason. By themselves—and without extending our research into the faithful membership—they are sufficient to make good our prediction that the work of the Society would attract into creative British cinema production a host of newcomers, increase their qualifications and widen their horizons.

I testify that we were a vastly happy ship. We operated by unruffled consensus and so had no formally appointed chairman, but I fell generally into that function as though it was an accident of nature. After all, I had been chairman of the Southampton FC Supporters Club at 16 and of the national Table Tennis Association at 17. I never remember the slightest differences on Council. We had indeed a common objective, and none of us a partisan advantage to pursue. Film critics, film exhibitors, sculptor, actor, zoologist, two artists, lecturer in literature, politician, socialite, and later a couple of film directors, another critic and another exhibitor—we all had varied backgrounds and we supplemented each other. Above all, and from first to last, Sidney Bernstein had resources of contacts and experience unique among us and dependable in every emergency. And the membership was patient with Council. General meetings annually examined the accounts, declared reactions to what was past, discussed avenues to be explored in the future. Some members (not the least helpful) were more vocal than others. But we were never lynched.

I remember high spots: the day Sidney Bernstein discovered for us a copy of the epoch-making first *Ben Hur*, made by Alcott and Rose on Coney Island one Saturday afternoon in 1907. It turned out to belong to an eponymous gentleman named exactly as the film, a tavern keeper of mighty forearms who lived somewhere east of the City, and was so (quite properly) jealous of his precious possession that he insisted on bringing it, taking it away and standing over

it all the time in the projection room.

There was the day of our sole riot. This was over *Entr'acte*, our first surrealist film (by René Clair). Strange what passions can be roused, far more savage than by politics, by the pros and cons of challenges to logic. We had just thought the picture delightful, a witty cod. But cries and catcalls rang out, pundits within the audience came within an ace of punching each other. Frank Dobson was sitting near Clive Bell, whose excitement was fever pitch in defence of what he regarded as an unjustly denigrated opus of genius. Dobson murmured pensively afterwards: 'Makes one think what they say of one's own work, doesn't it?'

There was the time of our worst near-disaster. A certain famous early German silent, by a master and including an experimental detail of high importance, had been held judicially to be in breach of copyright years before and ordered to be destroyed. By chance, we got to know of the possible whereabouts of a single surviving copy. Diplomatically approached, the widow of the author and copyright holder inflexibly denounced any attempt to find and show it. We bided our time, and after a few years it was announced in the press that a big American firm was about to remake the subject, having bought the rights from the widow. I called on the London manager of the firm, asked his permission for the Film Society to show the original, which he gave with the utmost amiability. We did, and a few days later were threatened by a writ from the widow. It turned out that the deal had not been finally completed and the selfsame manager was now trying to beat her price down by £1,000 on the ground that our show had depreciated the value of the literary property. I rushed round to the manager, complaining that he had told us the purchase was completed and given us permission. His reply could not have been more bland: 'It will be your word against mine.'

Yes, I remember many things. The show where Dziga Vertov insisted on bending the bar of the projector that fixed a maximum volume for sound reproduction. The film was *Enthusiasm* and he wanted it louder. The Tivoli walls shook. Also one gem of mischief. We managed to get for one programme a fascist feature glorifying the invasion of Ethiopia as *The Path of Heroes*, and a documentary shot by a Soviet cameraman from the other side of the front. We interwove them, punctuating each episode of the one with the corresponding opposite view of the other. The commentary, unaltered in either case, was read dead pan. The resulting impression was staggering. The Italian Embassy was less pleased.

Finally the most dicey show of all, the effort to use the Meisel music for Eisenstein's *October*. The music had been composed for a shorter version, after the German censor's scissors had done their worst. Ernest Irving, the conductor, had only one rehearsal to make it fit, and as Meisel arranged every note to correspond to a movement on the screen this was not just not easy, it was bloody impossible. Ernest performed miracles, but as the picture approached its finish the end of the score was racing the end title and it was a problem of which would reach the winning

\*Precision is not guaranteed. Categories are arbitrary and overlap and some subjects qualify for more than one. However, the figures can safely be accepted as indicative, with an error of probably less than 10 per cent.



# THE STORY SO FAR...

## THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH

A commentary by the screenwriter

Paul Mayersberg

Nicolas Roeg has just completed shooting his new film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* in New Mexico. The cast is headed by David Bowie and includes Rip Torn (Norman Mailer's *Maidstone* and *Payday*), Candy Clark (*American Graffiti*) and Buck Henry (who wrote the screenplays of *The Graduate*, *Catch 22* and *Day of The Dolphin* and played the lead in Milos Forman's *Taking Off*). 'I don't know whether it's a cast for a movie,' someone remarked, 'but it would be a hell of a dinner party.' In many ways the unusual combination of names reflects the unusual circumstances of the film's production, and also the special style of the piece.

*The Man Who Fell To Earth* is already a unique film. It is based on an American novel by Walter Tevis, who wrote the book on which the film *The Hustler* was based. It has an American cast except for Bowie and was shot on location in the United States. But it is in fact a British film financed, without any American money, by British Lion. This is the first time in the history of the British cinema that a film has been made in the United States without the preliminary financial involvement of an American distributor, and by a British company.

The novel was a fairly obscure one. It was published in 1963 as a soft cover original, never, as far as I know, in hard cover, and has been reprinted since then again in soft

cover in America. I can find no record of its publication in England, although Pan Books will be adding it to their list in the New Year.

When I say the novel is obscure, I don't mean that it has gone totally unremarked for the past twelve years. I mean that very few people seem to have read it, although quite a lot have heard of it. To my knowledge it has been optioned three times for film production, as an A feature film, as a low budget movie of the week, and as a possible television pilot for a series. The fact that the book had not reached the screen before this struck me as surprising when I first read it. The novel seemed to have most of the necessary ingredients on the basic commercial level for an exciting and, above all, unusual film. I have a hard time in grasping the idea that an unusual film subject only interests people *after* it has been produced.

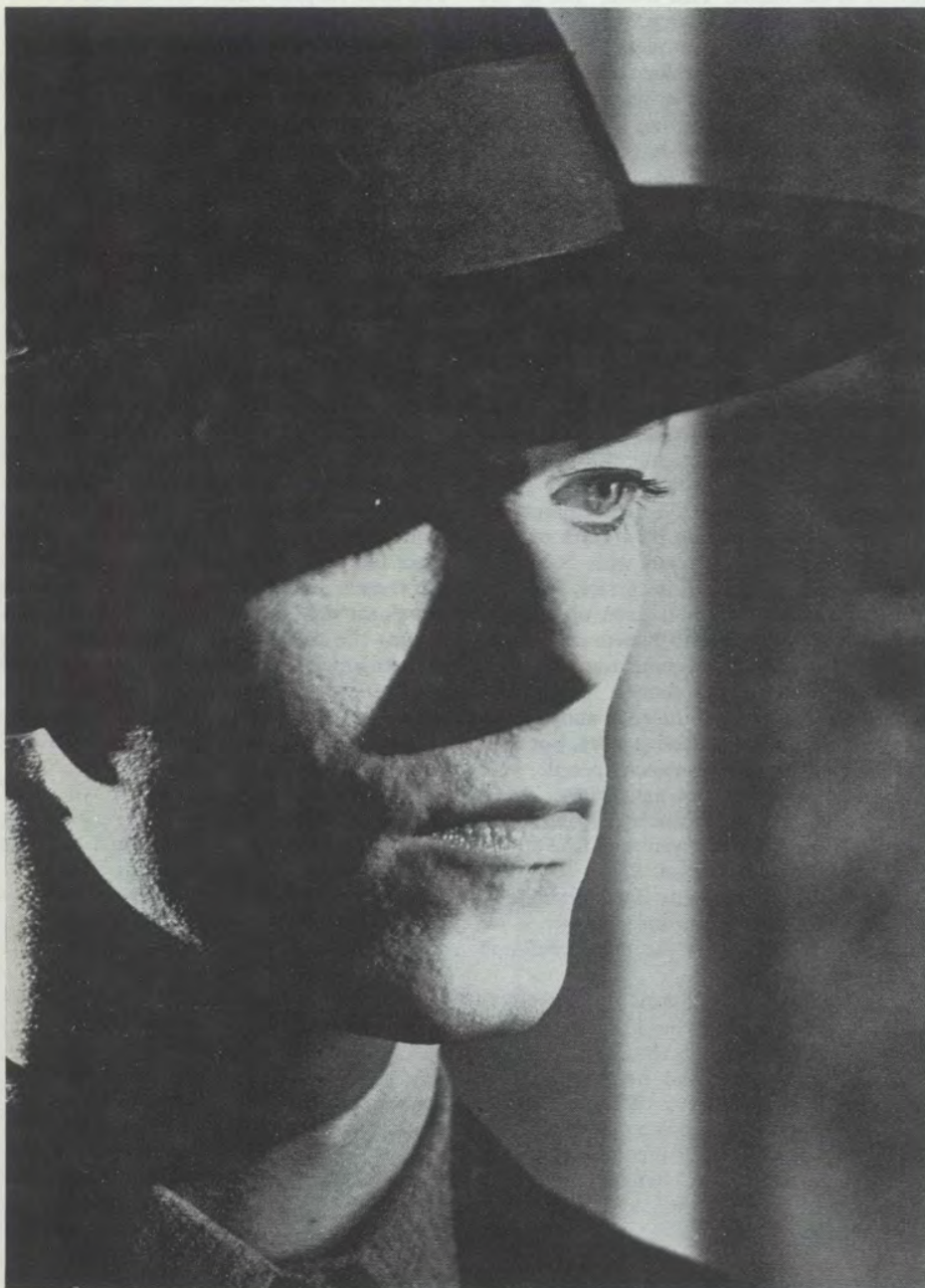
When Nicolas Roeg first showed it to me, and when we subsequently talked about it, the adaptation looked like being a relatively simple matter, at least from the point of view of a screenplay. That's to say there didn't seem to be any major obstacles in the development of the plot. The characters looked essentially right, the mood was coherent, and so on. Later, as I wrote the first draft, I became aware that the eventual film was not going to be at all easy. Slowly I began to see why the book had not been filmed before. In an odd way it was too much of a good thing.

### THE MYSTERY STORY

There were a number of aspects to the story which deserved, if not demanded, close and detailed attention. To begin with, the basic notion of a stranger appearing in the United States, knowing no one, apparently without a past, yet carrying a British passport, had the basis of a true mystery story; where did the stranger come from, why was he there, would he stay, would he return from whence he came? Then the mystery story turned into a detective story as well.

A professor of Chemistry at a mid-Western university, a certain Dr. Bryce, became intrigued by the extraordinary achievements of the Corporation owned by the stranger, whose name was as extra-

David Bowie as the stranger, Thomas Jerome Newton





ordinary as he was, Thomas Jerome Newton. Slowly and carefully, Dr. Bryce began to track his man down. Little by little he suspected that the 'chemistry' behind the formidable inventions was not completely explicable in presently known scientific terms. Then the detective story turns into Science Fiction.

When it was first published, *The Man Who Fell To Earth* was presented as a straight science fiction story. The blurb read as follows: 'Alien Visitor. He carried a human name: Thomas Jerome Newton. He walked into the Kentucky town with papers in his pocket that proved his identity, marked him as no different from the men and women around him. Oh, he was taller than average at six foot six inches, and his hair was as white as an albino's although he was relatively young. The tan colour of his skin seemed strange with the white hair, but there was nothing unusual about his pale blue eyes. There was one important difference, however; despite his human name, he was not human. He was a refugee from a world far distant in space, a world ravaged by the ultimate war... a world that was dying. He came to Earth to seek salvation for his people... but he met only bitterness and mistrust. For he was different: he wasn't human!'

Now while the science fiction element in the story is important it is not overriding. It would actually be misleading to call the movie a detective or even a mystery story. It has elements of almost every genre, even the Western, partly because of the way one aspect of the story leads into another (mystery—detection—science fiction) and partly because the film is set in and about America. And America is the home of all the genres.

British financed, *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is an American film, a kaleidoscope of that huge, diverse country. There is at least as much nostalgia for the bicentennial as there is future shock in the film. The wide array of scenes and images makes the subject and its treatment hard to classify.

In the end it may be impossible to classify, or the classification may become simply a matter of personal preference. What I have to say refers only to the stages of writing and about half the period of shooting, when I was present. It is impossible for me to know exactly how the film will turn out, shot for shot or cut for cut. This piece is about the constant process of transformation that goes on in a film. A film which is more than just an enactment of a story or screenplay, but is closer to the creation of a world with an independent life of its own.

By examining the treatment of the mystery story in this movie I can show how, first through the screenplay and then with the actors on the floor, the film of *The Man Who Fell To Earth* started life and spent its youth in a constant process of transformation of the original material. Later on, around the time this piece appears, the cutting and then the dubbing will take the film through to the last stages of its life. This is the story so far.

The character of the Chemistry professor, Dr. Bryce, played by Rip Torn in the movie, seemed at the beginning of the writing to be perhaps the easiest character to transcribe to

film terms. Perhaps because the detective figure in any new story has so many antecedents. In the event this character turned out to be the hardest from the point of view of the writing, both structurally and in the dialogue, to get right. As a matter of fact it wasn't until the early stages of shooting, during which time I was working with Nic Roeg on and off the set, that the character was fundamentally resolved. What happened, I think, during the various stages of scripting, was that Dr. Bryce began to look like a device in the story. He became one of those 'Dr.' figures of detective fiction. Many of the scenes with Bryce seemed to have the qualities of a very ordinary tale of detection; too many questions without answers, too many clues, too many puzzled looks.

Nic became increasingly nervous that the mystery of Thomas Jerome Newton might degenerate into something not far removed from a murder mystery, except that we had no murder. Slowly we began to dump the hangovers from the book and develop a completely different attitude towards the character of Dr. Bryce. In the book, for example, Bryce begins to doubt Newton almost at the outset. This meant that he set out in a way to trap a quarry. We substituted the idea of Newton as a quarry, rather than a quarry. Fascination became the keynote in Dr. Bryce's inquiry. To some extent we changed the idea of having an inquiry at all. We turned Bryce into a friend of Newton's rather than a foe.

This was implied in the novel, but the book employed the conventional machinery of tracking a man down which was a device more appropriate to a spy story than to the different kind of movie we had in mind. Bit by bit the unofficial private eye type procedure of investigation was dispensed with, and in its place we created scenes of admiration and even envy in Dr. Bryce, so he became not the law man determined to bring in the wrongdoer, but the man who admires from afar and who is finally given his chance to discover the truth about the subject of his fascination by a quirk of fate. Dr. Bryce is offered a job with Newton's Corporation, World Enterprises, just at the moment when he had given up hope of ever making contact with Newton.

The two characters come together in a mixture of intent and chance. The scenes between them have all the edge and tension of the conventional detective story, but they are human scenes between people, not obviously part of a plot mechanism. As in some of Graham Greene's writing, surprising friendships between men take on the suspenseful movement of detective yarns. The friendship between Dr. Bryce and Newton becomes dangerous because, as we all know, friendship is the most profound form of detection.

The change of emphasis in characterisation and story of the film is perhaps the equivalent of the constant adding and subtracting of clues and herrings, red or white, in a mystery story. When you come up with what you think is a great idea, you find that you can either incorporate it as a minor element, or it changes the whole concept and becomes the core of the piece, or it gets thrown out, or it is an interesting side issue, which is kept on that basis. You can never tell at the time. What seems a

vital clue on Monday, turns out on Tuesday to be a drunken aside.

What is very exciting, both in the writing and in the shooting, is when you begin to see clues emerge that remain significant or vital on Wednesday, Thursday and even Friday. I can give an example of this by examining the first scene in the movie which has dialogue.

Newton arrives in a small American town called Haneyville. In the book Haneyville was in Kentucky; in the film it is in New Mexico. Newton, a stranger, seems unsure of himself and uncertain of other people. It is very early in the morning. He waits outside a small jewellery, trinkets and bric-à-brac store. Eventually, the owner arrives and opens up the shop. Newton goes in and sells a gold ring which was given to him, he says, by his wife. He gets a few dollars for the ring and leaves the store.

That was the scene in the screenplay based on a similar scene in the book. What was shot by Nic Roeg was exactly that scene and yet something quite different. When Newton goes into the store he automatically pushes the door instead of pulling it open. The door surprises him. It's as if he's never seen one that pulls outwards before. The store owner is a woman, not a man, as I had written. She is about seventy years old, her hands and face completely wrinkled. She is decorated with a score of necklaces, bracelets, earrings and rings, all in the New Mexican Indian style of silver and turquoise. If the stranger in a strange land, played by David Bowie, seems odd to us, what are we to make of this even more extraordinary looking character? The encounter instantly poses the question: Who looks strange to whom? There are people who make Bowie look positively ordinary.

'Why can't the first man he meets be a woman?' Nic asked about a week before the scene was shot. Why not? The fact that she is a woman is not extraordinary to Americans, but it is to Newton. When we see the importance of women in his subsequent life, this scene will look in retrospect like a strange anticipatory 'teaser' to the theme. Other details too in this scene transform it, adding without displacing. When the old woman opens the cash register to take out the money we see a small gun in one of the compartments. The woman doesn't touch the gun, but we have an immediate feeling of threat which will work itself out in the subsequent scenes.

The screenplay specified that when the stranger takes his money, we see it reflected in mirrors in the shop. The idea I had was that this would presage the fact that Newton's money would multiply and re-multiply during the story. Somewhere in my mind was a reference too to *Citizen Kane*. Nic didn't shoot this. But he did produce a mirror shot. We see the back of Newton's head reflected in a mirror. This is an inexplicably disturbing shot. Firstly, his head is strange. His hair is orange but straight, immaculate and yet somehow not arranged. There seems no reason at this time to linger over a shot of the back of Newton's head. Again, it turns out that having seen later material, I can see that the movie is a minefield of images such as these. The first shot of the back of the man's head is the first emotional suggestion of his





Thomas Jerome Newton at the jeweller's shop in Haneyville

terrible vulnerability, which grows throughout the story.

None of the lines in this early scene was changed. A number of details in the action were added to, some mentioned here, some not, but no screenplay could convey the effect of the extraordinary swirling camera movement when Newton comes into the store. Because the shop is a cluttered place, the hand-held camera, following the man as he walks around it, makes a picture of fair-ground delirium before Newton finally arrives at the counter which is only a few feet away and offers the woman his ring for sale. This hand-held camera style is used at intervals during the film, integrated with less nervous imagery. The seeds of so much of the film are contained in this simple early scene.

Exactly how this scene will finally be cut, of course, I don't know. It may not be quite as I have described it, but having seen what was shot, it will be close. In any event, if it changes what exists so far, it will be a further transformation, part of this magical and organic process.

Mystery is really the assertion that things are not what they seem (one of the themes of *Don't Look Now*: 'There must be more,' the Police Inspector says to Donald Sutherland). In *The Man Who Fell To Earth* the mystery is not merely a matter of 'more' but different, almost inconceivable, and impossible to guess. The mere assertion that there is another world somewhere else, different from ours, calls each of our worldly notions into

question, our mystery. *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is much more about the mystery of love than the mystery of the Universe.

### THE ROMANTIC STYLE

One of the most important aspects of the story emerged clearly only during the preparation and shooting of the film, and not during the writing. The film turned into a romance, another example of transformation.

The stranger in a strange land is, of course, a deeply romantic notion. The picture of the solitary figure on the rim of the hill is romantic mystery incarnate, whether it appears in a Western or in a social documentary. This shot, which has appeared in so many films since the beginning of cinema, is enduring proof of the power of the image. The style not only of the photography in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, but of the performances, is romantic in the grand nineteenth century manner. The romantic photography is not soft-focus pictures in the French style of ten years ago, but closer to the style of contrasting light and shadow in the American cinema of the forties. American romantic mysteries and films noirs were not shot in colour at that time (colour was reserved for costume pictures and spectacles); had they been, they might have resembled some of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.

Hollywood in the 1940s took over the German and Viennese styles of the twenties

and adapted them into a softened expressionism. The basis of that photographic style was the lighting itself; the way the sets and faces and dresses were actually lit. In the sixties, when colour was introduced, the true romantic lighting became virtually a lost art. It was replaced by what you could perhaps call romantic lensing, soft-focus photography, using foreground compositions, relying on definite focal lengths. Technically, it was a much easier business. Imaginatively it was fairly feeble.

*The Man Who Fell To Earth* is lit by Anthony Richmond, the cameraman of *Don't Look Now*. It is lit and not simply photographed. It may be that at the end, when the whole film can be seen properly graded, the style of photography in the movie is closer to Cocteau or Franju than to the German cinema. Or, as I have a sneaking suspicion, it will ultimately resemble nothing other than itself. Another style for another kind of film. If the film contains many elements of so many genres which are united into a different style, then it is right that the piece should seek a unique but comprehensive look.

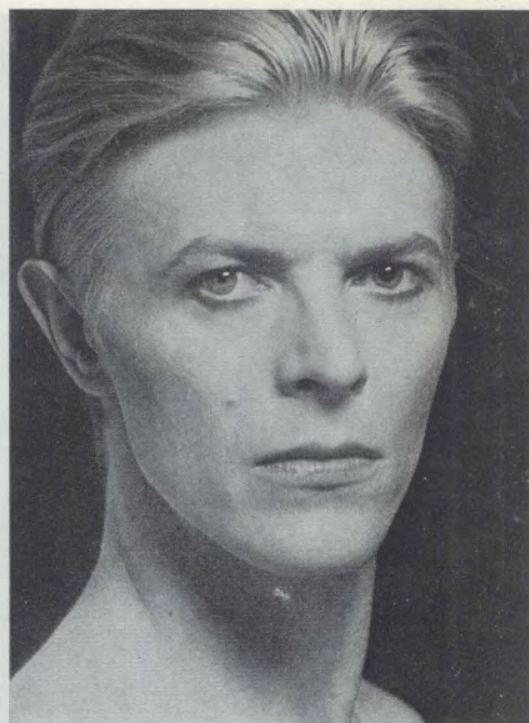
The essence of the romantic idea is a distrust of the fixed correct outline. Romantic painting tended to extract the essence of a scene or portrait by calling upon the emotional responses in the use of colour and light and shade. As it followed in the wake of the French Revolution, romantic art was an attempt to set man's personality free. If *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is a romantic film, it is because the subject encompasses



Right:  
Buck Henry as  
patent lawyer  
Oliver Farnsworth

Centre:  
David Bowie,  
Candy Clark

Below:  
Thomas Jerome  
Newton (David  
Bowie) soon  
after his  
mysterious  
arrival in the  
small town of  
Haneyville



Nicolas Roeg's

**THE MAN  
FELL TO**







AN WHO  
EARTH



Left:  
Newton at the  
start of his  
career as a  
tycoon

Below:  
Farnsworth and  
Newton: 'the  
archetype of the  
mystery woman  
arriving in the  
office of the  
private eye for  
help in so many  
Hollywood  
movies'







'... the impossible love story': Candy Clark and David Bowie

so much, more than I can begin to indicate here, and more than I would want to, for fear of spoiling the startling effect of the scenes which are juxtaposed. It is not so much a film where everything goes, but where everything goes together.

Watching the blueprint of the screenplay come to life on the set and then during rushes is occasionally unnerving for the writer. Sometimes the writing has been difficult and you get worried whether it will work. On other occasions it was easy and you worry that it was too easy, thoughtless even. But these are intellectual considerations. The emotional aspect of it all is different because it is primarily sensuous. You hear the words. The statues come to life. Everything strikes you as fresh.

The first major scene I saw filmed was an early scene in the movie where Thomas Jerome Newton, a long time after leaving the old woman in the store, appears in the New York penthouse of an ace lawyer called Oliver Farnsworth, played by Buck Henry. Newton has come to enlist Farnsworth's help with some patents. This is the start of his career as a tycoon in the United States. I had written in the screenplay that when Newton appears he is wearing a broad-brimmed hat and stands in the doorway silhouetted against the light. The scene takes place at night. In the rest of the scene there was no further reference to that shot. What Nic Roeg did was to devise the entire scene, and as written it's quite a long one, between the two men as an almost romantic encounter, at least in photographic terms. The set was warm and brown. The lamps cast a faint orange glow. Newton's face was bisected by a shadow. Somehow the mystery of Thomas Jerome Newton, who he is, what he really wants, was passed on into the whole look of the scene.

Apart from the photography, Bowie's presence, his pale face, his tinted glasses and the colour of his hair, turns him into the archetype of the mystery woman arriving in the office of the private eye for help in so many Hollywood movies. Buck Henry's thick eye-popping pebble glasses stare

uncomprehendingly at Newton. The eyes blink behind them, uncomprehending, but impressed. The lawyer's subsequent relationship to Newton is a slightly different version of Dr. Bryce's relationship to Newton later in the story.

The opening romantic image of the man on the hill streams on through scene after scene in the film. Just as the audience is affected by that shot, so the characters in the story are affected by the personality of the man in the shot. This idea gets its complete expression in Newton's relationship to the girl who befriends him.

Mary-Lou has a job as a chambermaid in a run-down hotel in Artesia, New Mexico. She is played by Candy Clark. Nothing about this girl is mysterious. She is a simple small town creature. Trusting, easily depressed, quick to smile, fundamentally uncomplicated. One day into her life walks Thomas Jerome Newton. She has no idea who he is or who he might be. She vaguely thinks that he is strange and sickly and that maybe he is on the run. Then she falls in love with him. Nothing is simple after this. No woman could be further from the notion of a *femme fatale*, and yet as Claude Mauriac remarked: 'Toutes les femmes sont fatales.'

The love story in *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is the impossible love story of two people who shouldn't, wouldn't, oughtn't ever to have met. And yet they did. *L'amour fou*. How can Newton know what love is like? How can Mary-Lou know what his true emotional make-up is? Drink helps, but it is not just another tale of 'those days of wine and roses which are not long.' It's the complete love affair in which you feel the pull of the Universe.

David Bowie's much remarked bi-sexuality, which may or may not be true (in my view not), transforms this complete romantic ambience through a definite two-way pull. Everyone is attracted towards Newton so when he becomes threatened we are threatened too, although it is the people who are threatening him who are closer to us.

In his rock music Bowie has used, more than anyone else, the combination of images from romantic stories and pictures from space. You only have to compare the portraits on the early album 'Space Oddity' in 1968 with the 1975 face of 'Young Americans'. The breathless, frightened, occasionally ecstatic delivery becoming increasingly like a saxophone is now a hallmark of Bowie's style. When he finishes his score for *The Man Who Fell To Earth* it should complete for the movie a complex romantic view of the world. His style is unique and because it is unique it is vulnerable, like the character he plays in the movie.

In the early scenes between Newton and Mary-Lou, we have that most interesting film situation in which we watch two actors who have nothing in common except the film they're in, two people who have nothing in common except the situation in which they find themselves, two styles which only half-grasp the other. Candy Clark's small town American girl, a bit garrulous, makes a sensational contrast with Bowie's traveller, with his quiet speaking voice, and youthful, timeless appearance.

These scenes are shot plainly, letting the actors perform. But even in the dingy hotel room in Artesia, the colour has a soft romantic amber in it which inevitably links it to the meeting between Newton and Farnsworth some years before in New York. Maybe it reminds you of Bowie's orange hair or the gold sunset when he first discovers water in the river. There is something dreamlike about the connections and dream is the ultimate blurring of contours. What has happened and what will happen merge in a state of dream. Dream is a memory and a prediction. It is deluding and fateful.

The last romantic construction is dream. But to call *The Man Who Fell To Earth* a dream movie would be misleading. It is romantic and there is a hint of dream, but much of it is brutally true. You need not forget that romantic art was initiated by social upheaval and political and ethical conflict. As a romantic film *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is inevitably a social and political film.

## ALL FICTION IS SCIENCE FICTION

When I examined the novel there were some difficult aspects that presented themselves. The book, which was published in the year of John Kennedy's assassination, conveyed an attitude which today seems somewhat naïve. The actual presence of a President of the United States in the novel of *The Man Who Fell To Earth* seemed, after the saturation of Watergate and CIA exposures, to be unconvincing. In the very first draft of the screenplay I retained that political element. Nic didn't like it and in retrospect it does seem awkward. However, it is impossible to tell an interesting story about the United States today without referring to a social and political context. So I rewrote areas of the film to try to come to grips with what one might guess were the State Department's attitudes towards the existence of Thomas Jerome Newton. This was all very much in the wake of Uri Geller's exploits and the controversy surrounding them. Again, there was the



problem of topicality which was dating itself as you wrote.

How this problem in the film was eventually overcome, at least in terms of script and structure, is extremely interesting. I had invented a character who did not exist in the novel who, at the point where Newton's corporation, World Enterprises, became a Howard Hughes-like complex, started to discuss the future of the company with its President, who by this time was Oliver Farnsworth, the lawyer Newton hired. In the reading of this character there was an ambiguity. Was he a Government figure? A man from the Mafia, or what? In a film where the characters were real and defined, this man seemed too allegorical, too un-specific. None the less in one form or another what he represented was both essential and likely.

After considerable thought and rewriting, this character became a man with a definite social purpose, not a strong-arm man but a kind of policeman of the economy. He became a man who suddenly saw that Newton's huge corporation could be a signal that private enterprise as we know it might be drawing to its end, and that he must act. In order fully to grasp the social significance of this character, who only has three scenes in the movie, he has actually to be seen. A decision of Nic Roeg's about his appearance changed this whole aspect of the film. Suddenly, because of who this man had become, the film took on an element of political science fiction.

Whenever you tamper with stories and characters to project them into a world that has not quite come into being, you are, in fact, playing with time. In an interview in this journal about *Don't Look Now* Nic Roeg pointed out that one of his primary interests in film was as a time machine. He was referring to the fact that you can move the film and the characters back and forth, especially during the process of editing. You can even go sideways, guessing as it were, at a state that is neither before, during nor after.

*The Man Who Fell To Earth* presents the complete movie time machine in action. Time was one of the major themes in the original novel. Perhaps it is not true to say that time was an overt theme. The novel had a lengthy time span which, as any adaptor of books to films will tell you, is one of the trickiest things to handle. Traditionally, long time spans are supposed to make audiences bored and the characters lose their interest. In fact, of course, some of the most important films ever made have been films that took another look at the non-discursive subject of time. By 'non-discursive' I mean a theme which is present, but does not have an ultimate moral point or directive. I was thinking of films like *Citizen Kane* or *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. These movies fundamentally employ the device of the flashback to an extent where some scenes become flashforwards. In *Marienbad*, Resnais or Robbe-Grillet, or both, devised a series of interlocking dreams to cope with time. This was more sophisticated than *Hiroshima*, but also less widely appealing.

*The Man Who Fell To Earth* is an extravagant entertainment. It has dozens of scenes that go together, not just in terms of plot, but also like circus acts following one

another; the funny, the violent, the frightening, the sad, the horrific, the spectacular, the romantic and so on. We have clowns and lions and trapeze artists and dancing elephants and performing seals and ladies fired from cannons. The circus aspect of the movie is also, and in a rather different way, a game with time. It is all a matter of convention. Nobody talks of the non sequiturs of a circus because the plot isn't clear. The reason is that everybody knows the form at a circus. *The Man Who Fell To Earth* is a movie where we hope to introduce another form, or an interesting variation of an existing one, into the cinema. I don't know if there is a true antecedent of this film. Certainly there was none either in my mind or, as far as I know, in Nic's. That's to say there was no single antecedent. I would like to think that the nearest film to this one was perhaps *Les Enfants du Paradis*, which was fundamentally a simple story, but it stretched out through time and space in which characters were joined in their memories and thoughts and fears and loves. That film was a trip inside and out, which was historical fiction rather than science fiction. But all fiction is the same. It is unimportant what the hardware or the costumes or the décor are. The purpose of romance and mystery is to blend unlikely or unexpected things and break the time barrier that way.

Nicolas Roeg and I have worked on two other film subjects before this one, neither of which was made. During that period of some years we have developed a relationship in which certain shared preferences for film and other subjects have emerged. Perhaps these two 'trial runs', if that's what they were, made it possible to lick a subject as difficult as this one. Of course, it may be that when the film appears, the world will think otherwise. In any case the key to the success or failure of this particular movie lies in Nic's complete calculations about the final form, and that's still a little way off.

He and I went through a number of drafts before arriving at a refined first draft. Then we worked on from there during the production itself. Nic was unwilling to

discard any scene, however clumsily written, if he thought it held an element which might be of value, although not perhaps in the form in which it was immediately expressed. The reason was that he believed any thought was worth examining because of what it might lead to. My instinct to begin with was not to write everything that entered my head because of an innate fear of contradiction. Curiously, I would be inclined to think of the finished film as I wrote, whereas in the early stages of writing, Nic would prefer not to think of the finished film at all.

Most writers have, as a habit, a definite attitude towards form. This is perhaps the major limitation of the writer in film. Formal correctness implies a certain conservatism. The fact is that there is plenty of time for judgments about what will work and how, and what won't and why, much later on. What we finally devised was a way of collaborating that would produce, long after the act of writing was finished, a film that worked on the screen. There is a problem here because if you write, as I have found out in the past, a film that will work on the screen, it very often happens that it looks on the page as if it will not. The true film script, which is not a thinly disguised novel, is often hard for producers, companies, distributors and even actors to grasp. In the case of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, had it not been for the complete faith of the producers in the potential of the film, it might never have been made. Happily, it was.

A footnote. Some years ago, in 1967, this journal published an extract from my book *Hollywood: The Haunted House*; it was a chapter on the writer in Hollywood called 'The Great Rewrite'. In this I recorded the memories of a few writers in America about their work in films. They were mostly unhappy with their relationships with the people around them. Having now written my first film, I'm pleased to say that I cannot claim anything similar. The writer in films has it in his power to help make the *auteur* theory work. ■

David Bowie: the stranger in a strange land







Alison Halliwell as the parson's wife, a hesitant middle-class convert to righteousness and radicalism

# WINSTANLEY

Penelope  
Houston

In Mamoun Hassan's time at the BFI Production Board, it was a standing joke, ironic and affectionate, that it took a Saudi Arabian to have such a sense of purpose and involvement about the survival of a British cinema that would be authentically British. The thinly stretched shoestring of the Board's operation, as it advanced gingerly into feature production, would have made any large claims ridiculous; and they were not made. But in seeing the generation of film-makers who have gone mid-Atlantic as 'the light that failed', and in arguing for attitudes that the cinema at large was rejecting as uncommercial, unfashionable and unwanted, Hassan was perhaps looking back across the divide of the prodigal years of American occupation of British studios, to Free Cinema, the early days of Woodfall, the post-1956 aspirations. In British cinema there's always the sense of a stopped clock to be got ticking again.

It may be an accident that two of the Board's most imposing products, Bill Douglas' duo *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk* and now Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's *Winstanley*, stand somewhat out of time; in their severe black and white integrity, they can't be 'placed' by thumbing through the 1960s references. And they are unmistakably of their country. Douglas' films, with their sense of unforgiven loss and of circumscribed existences lived below

subsistence level emotionally as well as materially, are the gritty product of the Scottish mining towns. Brownlow and Mollo's film is as plainly Southern English in its gentler landscapes and attitudes: a social document in which obstinate persistence is tempered by diffidence—as, one might note, in Brownlow's own way of filming.

The history of *Winstanley* is almost as chequered and strenuous as that of Brownlow and Mollo's *It Happened Here*. It started as a closer adaptation of David Caute's novel *Comrade Jacob*, but seems to have shed most of the book, along with the title, on its way. Brownlow and Mollo made resolute efforts to interest the industry in the project, before landing in the last haven of the Production Board. As with their earlier film, they cast it almost entirely with amateurs, on occasion pursuing people around streets and railway stations when they spotted a 17th century cast of countenance for recruitment. Much shooting had to take place at weekends, to accommodate people's normal lives, and over a long period (a seven week schedule stretched across a year) since the film covers all the seasons. At the very end, they wanted snow, and got it in a photo-finish; the one light snowfall of the season was dribbling away as the camera was being set up. Also as

before, Brownlow and Mollo managed to enlist a range of highly specialised support, from the Sealed Knot, who restage the battles of the Civil War, to the Rare Breeds Trusts and others who lent them animals—the cow that faces glumly into the camera is as near a 17th century cow as animal husbandry allows. There were problems of the peculiar kind that dog the shoestring epic. I remember Brownlow telling me while they were shooting that he was having a trying time with the horses, hired from a local riding school and altogether too docile and civilian to take kindly to the chore of riding down the peasantry.

But this is background. If the exertions involved in this style of film-making suggest a kind of mini-Stroheim, demanding authenticity from every button on every soldier's uniform, the point at which this becomes relevant for the audience is when it's on the screen. Accuracy is a starting point and an attitude. Out of it comes a document reflecting, at three different but interlocking levels, the film-makers' concern with the past. First, there's the physical props, and the assurance that anachronisms are being avoided; then, Brownlow's own powerful devotion to the cinema's past, his film historian's feeling for texture and lighting and the look of the silent screen; finally, the loyalty to words, the attempt to suggest not only what people thought, but



how they thought it. In *It Happened Here*, they frightened the wits out of some honourable and liberal-minded people by letting British fascists put their case directly, with its insidious appeal to chauvinism. Here, in a subject which fairly bristles with contemporary parallels, Brownlow and Mollo are so concerned with their own authenticity, the context as it was and not as it might be made to seem, that ironically they may be accused by the unimaginative of filming merely a history lesson.

The period of the film is those few years of the Puritan revolution when England came under military rule (and learned a permanent distrust of soldiers in power) and when theories of equality, a primitive kind of communism, the social contract (long before Rousseau, and longer before Harold Wilson) stirred inside and outside the ranks of the New Model Army. Elected representatives of the troops (called Agitators, a term of which Lenin is said to have taken due note in the use of *agit*), joined forces with civilian radicals to make up the Leveller interest; the proposals known as the 'Agreement of the People' were discussed at the great Putney debates of 1647 ('what a film that would make,' says Brownlow); Leveller mutinies in the army were broken up. Into a swift, compressed opening, the film packs a lot of history—a battle, cut to the *Alexander Nevsky* music, and put together surely and impressionistically, in deliberate homage to Eisenstein, Welles and other masters, followed by informational titles interspersed with brief interludes from such occasions as the Putney debates. Leveller pamphlets are seen sprouting from the soldiers' knapsacks; for this was one of the great ages of sectarian pamphleteering, the battlefield of words.

Having set the scene, the film turns its attention to the particularly sympathetic figure of Gerrard Winstanley (Miles Halliwell) and his Digger movement. Winstanley believed, perhaps with more faith than real confidence, in an approaching millennium which would restore the earth to 'its first conditions'—a divinely ordained pastoral state in which land was owned and worked in common. 'The stronger did work for the weaker, and the whole Earth was common to all without exception.' The Fall came with the whole idea of property: 'This particular propriety of mine and thine hath brought in all misery upon people. For, first it has occasioned people to steal from one another. Secondly, it has made laws to hang those that did steal.' Winstanley's ideas of common ownership were those of a religious visionary, certainly not an economist: it was God's purpose that would be working itself out, and his notions of how this should be done seem to have depended on very small, self-sufficient rural communities, independent of trade. But there he is: communist, anarchist, religious thinker, proclaiming 'to the powers of England and to the powers of the world why the common people have begun to dig on George's Hill.'

What makes Winstanley so attractive is not only his persistence (he did not stop with the Digger experiment) but the resolute, slightly ludicrous but utterly whole-hearted attempt to convert theory into action. For

a year or so, in 1649-50, Winstanley and his group of twenty or thirty were settled on the commons at Weybridge, digging and planting ('parsnips, carrots and beans,' says one record), angering the local people by general oddity and by seeming to threaten their grazing lands, and an embarrassment to the authorities. It is hard to imagine what future Winstanley really saw for his little commune, and the few other Digger communities were evidently even more precarious. But if and when the millennium came, the Diggers would be ready: in Weybridge at least, 'the poor people... shall be the saviours of the land.'

Winstanley, who didn't believe in property, was beaten by the laws of property. The army, in the person of Fairfax, dealt with the Diggers tolerantly; Leveller leaders were imprisoned in the Tower, but the Diggers must have seemed rather an innocuous civilian nuisance. The local landowners took them to court, and finally had them driven off the commons. Lawyers and clergymen, as well as landowners, offended Winstanley's sense of simplicity—he was, if you like, a kind of Douanier Rousseau among political theorists. And lawyers and the local clergyman landowner, Parson Platt, brought about his downfall. The film has a marvellous scene in which the Diggers are hauled before a magistrate (played with fine 17th century aplomb by Stanley Reed, former director of the British Film Institute), who rouses himself from mumbling in Latin to tell them with the utmost courtesy that the court simply can't recognise their presence unless they have a lawyer to speak for them. Winstanley, and others, felt that the oppression of law had come in with the Conquest. 'Norman power' was the enemy of the people.

*Winstanley* allows its leading character clarity of expression, preferring his own written words to a scriptwriter's paraphrase of ideas into dialogue. Inevitably, this has a distancing effect, and the film's straightforward, chronological structure lets its long central section—between the opening battle, and the set-piece of the final firing of the Digger hovels—work as a series of disconnected, tableau-like scenes. Events are not 'dramatised'; we don't follow the Diggers into their huts to look at their private lives, individual personalities are sparsely developed, as occasion requires. The Diggers build and plant; are caught napping by locals who smash their huts; intermittently they are called to appear before authority. A group of Civil War Ranters, with more rumbustious and socially unacceptable ideas about shared property and shared women, are received dubiously into the commune. Parson Platt's wife, a hesitant convert, comes up the hill to join them, but scampers back affronted to her husband's side.

Life on the hill is no pastoral idyll, but a ragged, grubby business, and the discomfort of this beggar encampment is contrasted with the settled, well-lit decorum of the parsonage and the manor house. In reading of the Digger experiment, one tends to imagine an idealistic venture, pursued by people who had left stable homes behind them. The film sees it—probably with reason—as more like a post-war refugee settlement. The Civil War was a period of unrest, of poor harvests and unemployment

and inflation; the little group on the hilltop, old soldiers and camp followers and out of work tradesmen, may well have been driven to stick it out by desperation as much as by the wish to demonstrate an ideal.

The film could have made life easier for itself by underlining some evident points of comparison between then and now (squatters, hippies, inflation, radical theory) or by letting its undramatised narrative lead it in the Brechtian or Godardian direction of conscious demonstration. But Brownlow and Mollo operate on a less sophisticated level of structure, and in shape and detail the film owes more to its other historical allegiance—the silent screen. Ernest Vincze's camera-work achieves effects which are beautiful without descending to prettiness. The country (including the barren stretch we keep looking down on, where four lanes meet in a rough cross) is bare, the weather often threatening, and as Winstanley's own followers seem to betray the dream, in a scene where the film lets the passion break through, a storm breaks over the hill. In another, gentler moment, the parson's wife meets Winstanley in the fields, to contribute a charitable mite to the enterprise. One may be sure that her carriage is 17th century down to the harness straps; but the visual associations are more striking, links across fifty years of screen history.

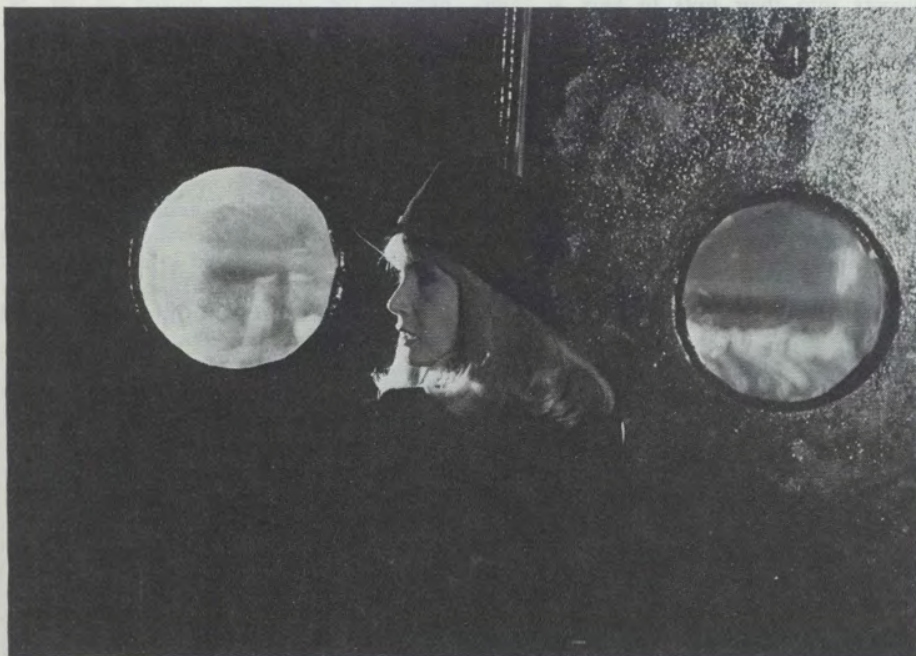
Since *It Happened Here*, now more than ten years ago, Brownlow and Mollo have failed to get another feature off the ground. Now, they have chanced their arm with a brave picture, composed and fittingly Puritanical. 'It hasn't,' one friendly but unhelpful distributor told them, 'the panache of *It Happened Here*.' Indeed not. The Diggers didn't get very far, couldn't have got very far, and didn't even acquire some panache through being martyred for their convictions. They were simply pushed off, back into the obscurity of history. Even David Robinson, writing sympathetically about *Winstanley* in *The Times*, describes its hero as 'a Cromwellian soldier'; which he was not. The resurrection of forgotten pasts is no easy enterprise, and perhaps one needs an even clearer reminder than the film offers of exactly when the adventure happened: the Diggers moved in on St. George's Hill just three months after the regicides, in a full and quaking sense of their responsibility, had beheaded the king; in one of those instants of history when the previously unimaginable began to seem possible.

But signposting is not the way of the film: it's consistently understated, rather under-acted, tenacious, and expects an audience to be prepared to do some work in picking up allusions. Like its subject, it finds radical expression through traditional forms; but forms vigorous for its purposes. As the parson's wife stumbles up the hillside in her black cloak, or the lady of the manor explains her theory of charity (how could this virtue be practised without the poor to practise on?) and the camera closes on a face from a Stuart portrait, or the Diggers try to harvest the crops planted with such difficulty, the identity of the past asserts itself. That *Winstanley* is going to disappoint anyone looking either for a costume drama or a polemic about the birth of British socialism is beside the point. ■



# Les Filles du Feu

## Rivette X4



Gilbert Adair  
Michael Graham  
Jonathan Rosenbaum

*In theory, from the vantage point of early spring, it would go something like this: four movies to be shot consecutively, each one an average-length feature to be filmed in three weeks; editing to begin after the fourth is shot, the four films edited in the order of their successive releases.*

*For practical reasons, shooting order—2, 4, 1, 3—has to differ from editing and release order . . . In practice, from the vantage point of late July, the three-week schedules had to be abandoned once the separate films grew—in scale if not in running time—and Jacques Rivette is currently preparing to shoot the third film, No. 1 in the series.*

Some preliminary ground rules: each film covers the same 40-day Carnival period, extending from the last new moon of winter to the first full moon of spring, when goddesses are permitted commerce with mortals. These 'daughters of fire'—the title is taken from Nerval—come in two varieties, Daughters of the Sun (fairies) and Daughters of the Moon (ghosts). No. 1, a love story, will have a mortal (Albert Finney) as hero, a ghost (Leslie Caron) as heroine. No. 2, a *film noir*, pits a ghost (Juliet Berto) against a fairy (Bulle Ogier) while each searches for a diamond that can keep her alive past the allotted forty days, leaving three mortal female victims in their wake. No. 3, a musical comedy conceived for Anna Karina and Jean Marais, will have a fairy playfully switching around the identities of three mortal men. No. 4, a Jacobean tragedy, sets two vengeful ghosts (Geraldine Chaplin, Kika Markham) against a pirate fairy (Bernadette Lafont), with plenty of perishable mortals in between.

Some goddesses may reappear in separate guises in later movies, but each film is designed as a discrete unit. Live music from on-screen musicians will figure increasingly from one film to the next, in instrumentation as well as frequency. For the first time since *La Religieuse*, all the shooting will be in 35 mm, in the same wide-screen ratio (1 x 1 : 85) as the former.

By necessity, the following reports are not of completed works but of *tournages*. Rivette's working methods change radically from one project to the next, making predictions extremely difficult; and from its inception, *Les Filles du Feu* has been in a state of constant evolution. Thus many of the projections here and below are subject to revision, and the events described relate less to the films themselves than to particular stages in their developments.

*Juliet Berto (Leni, a ghost) and Bulle Ogier (Viva, a fairy) in film No. 2 of Jacques Rivette's 'Les Filles du Feu'*



*April 14, Paris:* Arriving late morning in Parc Montsouris, not far from Cité Universitaire, I come upon Rivette and his crew shooting part of the final sequence of *L'Oeil Froid* (a tentative title later replaced by *Viva*, which is no less tentative), a sort of duel at dawn between Hermine Karagheuz (Lucie, a mortal) and Juliet Berto (Leni, a ghost) in front of an imposing tree. Lucie is holding out an enormous diamond that glows an improbably bright and bloody red, a trick contrived with batteries and invisible wires. 'Red Magic,' Rivette says to me in English, laughing, between takes.

Both actresses are veterans of *Out 1* and *Spectre*, Rivette's most extended experience with what he calls 'improvisation sauvage', but this time they aren't improvising at all. All 27 sequences in the film have been mapped out in advance by Rivette and a scriptwriter, Eduardo De Gregorio, and the latter and Marilu Parolini are writing the dialogue every day only hours—sometimes minutes—before the players commit the lines to memory and deliver them for the cameras; if adjustments are made, it is Rivette alone who makes them.

There's no dialogue in the present shot, and while Karagheuz glints menacingly at the camera in red jacket and jeans, Berto is standing out of camera range in a flowing cape, looking quite a bit like a ghost. Some of her appearances, like those of the other goddesses, will be heralded by gusts of wind, in interiors as well as exteriors, and theoretically her features will gradually grow whiter and paler over the course of the film while her lips turn steadily redder, until this climactic confrontation, when she assumes some of the pallor of the phantom princess in *Ugetsu*.

In some ways, the relaxed and congenial mood of the crew suggests a family reunion. Karagheuz has acted in two previous Rivette films, Berto in three and Bulle Ogier in four; Parolini worked on *L'Amour Fou*, De Gregorio on *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* and the unproduced *Phénix*, and both collaborated with Bertolucci on the script of *The Spider's Strategy*; the project has the same producer, Stéphane Tchalgadjieff, as *Out 1* and *Spectre*; the script girl worked on *L'Amour Fou*, and the stills photographer is Berto's sister.

During lunch in a nearby bistro, Rivette quickly goes over the afternoon's hand-written dialogue, alters the order of two sentences, gives it back to De Gregorio so final copies can be written out for the actors, and then continues to talk about the movies he saw over the weekend. A rarity among directors, he keeps up with cinema as religiously as a daily critic, and not even a *tournage* will necessarily encourage him to swear off entirely. The story is told that on one occasion, when *The Golden Coach* first opened in Paris, he spent an entire day in the cinema, from first show to last—testimony to a kind of dedication and endurance that may not be unrelated to the running times of his last four films.

While the crew sets itself up in the Labyrinth of the Jardin des Plantes—a spiral footpath which leads up a hill overlooking the promenade and greenhouse—for an afternoon of retakes, De Gregorio describes a few of the cinematic reference

points at work in the film. Before shooting started, *The Seventh Victim*, perhaps the most elliptical and troubling of Val Lewton's films, was screened for members of the cast and crew (three months later, for the next film, *Moonfleet* will be projected for comparable reasons), and *film noir* conventions are constantly kept in mind. Tomorrow's shooting in the adjacent greenhouse is partially prompted by *The Big Sleep*, just as a future meeting in an aquarium is suggested by *The Lady from Shanghai*; and *Kiss Me, Deadly* seems to be regarded as a *locus classicus* throughout.

The present scene is an earlier meeting between Leni and Lucie which will occur roughly halfway through the film; in principle, a series of short dialogues separated by jump cuts as they meet and walk along parts of the spiral path and elsewhere. Initially filmed near the beginning of shooting, this is being partially redone with different dialogue now that Rivette has had a chance to look at the rushes and rethink the *mise en scène*. The time will be dusk, the location rather dark under a network of branches: like the other ghosts in the tetralogy, Leni functions best at night, just as Viva, along with the other fairies, prefers the brightness of day.

By late afternoon, a light rain has started, but the crew goes on shooting well past official break-up time, in the cramped quarters of the curious little gazebo on top of the hill. There hasn't been enough time to secure permission from the park authorities to use this location, which Rivette selected on the spur of the moment, so there's a slightly tense and watchful mood as the camera makes 360° pans following Leni and Lucie round the small perimeter of the raised platform.

*April 15:* In the sweltering greenhouse, Viva (Bulle Ogier), the sun-goddess, meets Jeanne (Nicole Garcia), another mortal, known as Elsa when she works as ticket-girl in a dance hall. Will this scene between blondes 'double' the meeting between brunettes Leni and Lucie in the former's shadowy domain in the Labyrinth, which is planned to transpire two sequences earlier? Ogier, outfitted in a grey velvet

pants suit with pink scarf and blouse, black gloves and stick—the latter concealing a mean-looking blade—greets Jeanne in a *film noir* trenchcoat streaked with a yellow scarf. But if the actresses' costumes are correspondingly ethereal and earthy, the expressions playing over their faces often provide a strange contrast and counterpoint—a paradox which seemed to surface at odd junctures in yesterday's shooting as well, when Lucie would suddenly take on an unearthly look or Leni would begin to seem human.

Once again, the characters walk while they talk, and the camera is frequently on the move as well. William Lubtchansky—cameraman on *Les Violins du bal* and husband of Nicole, who edited *L'Amour Fou* and *Out 1* with Rivette—is having to manoeuvre some fairly tricky tracks and hand-held turns in the narrow passages between the plants. At one point, he has to be pulled backwards by assistants and then swung around to one side while the women approach on parallel paths which converge at the tip of a botanical island, then criss-cross their positions. This shot, too, is a retake of something filmed three weeks ago, and among the many changes, it now lasts 50 seconds instead of 103. Jeanne begins all her lines with phrases from *Les Chevaliers de la Table Ronde*—Cocteau is being quoted fairly often in the dialogue—and continues in an increasingly dreamy and glassy-eyed manner while unseen birds chatter wildly around her. By the end of their exchange, she's gazing at the ceiling like a somnambulist: 'Elsa... Jeanne? Elles sont mortes. Il ne reste que moi. Invulnérable. De fer.'

After lunch, the crew drives to the edge of Paris, a grey neighbourhood near Avenue d'Ivry—'Rivette likes it because it's depressing,' someone cracks, although the assistant director, Bertrand Van Effenterre, picked the spot. A poster displaying a pop singer is covered with tarpaulin for the background of the first shot in a scene where Lucie follows Viva. The composition, Lubtchansky notes, is a Delvaux; Viva, some distance away, descends a steep flight of steps and approaches the camera while Lucie stealthily slinks around corners and moves after her in sudden angular bursts, making staccato

'Viva': Hermine Karagheuz and Juliet Berto in the Parc Montsouris





zigzag motions as she darts from one hiding place to the next.

The next shot occurs on an even bleaker adjacent street with decrepit turn-of-the-century houses and peeling paint. Viva and Lucie approaching from some distance again. But this time something extraordinary happens: a portly middle-aged woman with hair the colour of ashes and sawdust, unaware of the presence of actors and crew, wanders down the street after the take begins and stoops over to peep through a mail slot in a tin fence—a Lumière subject suddenly come to life. She steps back a bit, looks around: will she notice the camera on one side, the approaching actresses on the other? Rivette can barely contain himself; everyone holds his breath. She looks through the slot again, and just as she passes, Karagheuz has the ingenious idea of incorporating her as a prop, a temporary shield to hide behind... Lubtchansky declares it a successful take; certainly it's an unrepeatable one. The woman wanders off, still oblivious to the movie she's stumbled into, and I step over to the mail slot to see what she was peering at. The answer: nothing at all.

It's already starting to drizzle and grow dimmer when Lucie and Viva proceed down opposite sides of an underpass, away from the camera; by the time they're crossing a footbridge towards the camera over some railway tracks, it's *mise en scène* under a driving rain, Lubtchansky and camera protected by waterproof plastic, everybody else getting soaked. If improvisation in this movie is being denied to the players, it's none the less figuring in the writing, directing and spirited scampering about, the unwitting extras and the elements themselves.

*April 16:* Very elaborate tracking in a dingy, labyrinthine corner of Gare d'Austerlitz occupied by baggage lockers—this location selected by Rivette. The camera moves 30 feet to the left when Lucie enters, following her in medium shot to a locker. A static, closer shot shows her opening it with a key, taking out a tiny box and shaking it

(the diamond is inside). Shot three, starting in a close-up, has the camera precede her over 46 feet of curving tracks as she returns the way she came; after she leaves the shot, it tracks forward again as Viva descends a spiral staircase directly across its line of vision. All in all, one very small and complicated piece of a very complicated plot.

Between shots, Rivette amuses himself by cheerfully reading aloud from a copy of Truffaut's recently published criticism, which someone has brought along. To translate freely: 'Fellini shows [in 8½] that a director is first of all a man whom everybody worries from morning to night by asking questions which he can't or won't answer. His head is filled with small divergent ideas, impressions, new-born desires, and one requires him to deliver certainties, precise names, exact figures, indications of time and place.'

J.R.

## 2

I offer here no more than the random gleanings of a casual observer, as I am convinced that any attempt at analysis on my part would be dishonest and as fraught with booby-traps as the undergrowth of criss-crossing wires on the floor of a film set itself. I am not a frequenter of films on location, but what most impressed me about my visit to *Viva* was the sense of there being two distinct narratives that I might follow: that of the film proper and that, even more intricate and mysterious, of the filming, a disjointed narrative that would nevertheless, and sooner than I anticipated, gather its own momentum, with its own dramatic highlights, comic relief, and so on. A film outside a film, as one says: a film within a film.

It is in the Hotel Meurice, a sumptuous old pile on the Rue de Rivoli and the terminus of an exceptionally circuitous route that has taken Rivette and his actors from the Jardin des Plantes to a working-class dance hall, from an aquarium to a gambling den, that I watch part of the shooting. There, camping in one of its mirrored salons, is a largely young and blue-jeaned

crew, busy adjusting the arc lights, testing the boom that is perched over the set like a fishing rod, or lugging the camera, and William Lubtchansky, who is sitting on it, along heavy tracking rails. And there, at the far end of these rails, Rivette himself sits, cross-legged and patient, in the midst of this monstrous train set.

The shot being set up is somewhat complicated. Elsa (Nicole Garcia) nervously enquires at the reception desk for a certain Monsieur Pierre, the clerk offers her a seat and sets off in search of the elusive guest. After picking up this little scene in long-shot, Lubtchansky's camera, followed closely by Bulle Ogier as Viva, all in pearl-grey velveteen and as radiant with supernatural health and malice as the other girl is deathly white, begins a slow track to where Elsa is seated, passing a vacant chair beside hers, then turning, no less abruptly than Elsa does herself, to reveal that same empty chair now magically occupied by Viva, the actress having neatly slipped herself into it at the very instant it left the frame. As I watch this shot eerily turn first-person en route and twist its own tail with the minimum of fuss, I can't help thinking of certain equally beautiful 'shots' in sport: a hole in one, or one of those apparently effortless manoeuvres in billiards, thrilling even to one ignorant of the game. After four or five takes, Rivette is satisfied, the clerk returns to his desk, and the two actresses to their own reflections.

It is during preparations for the following scene, in which Viva wickedly attempts to worm from Elsa the nature of her relationship to the mysterious Monsieur Pierre, that I have a chat with Jean Wiener, who improvises at the piano throughout the film. In the 1920s, Wiener played the piano at the Boeuf sur le Toit, was friend to Cocteau and Stravinsky, 'discovered' jazz and was, in a general way, the seventh member of Les Six. Obviously delighted to be once more part of an *avant garde*, if so unlike that of his own generation, he confesses that, though fully concurring in the idea of improvising during a *tournage*, his merry-go-round (or melancholy-go-round) waltzes and foxtrots being recorded simultaneously with the dialogue, it has puzzled him to see, in the rushes, scenes in which he himself '*un vieux monsieur chauve au piano*' is perfectly visible. He is even more bemused by Rivette's explanation: that, given the complexity of certain camera movements, it was the simplest solution.

As the shot is rather long in setting up, in part due to the omnipresent mirrors creating unwanted sources of light, in part to Rivette's increasingly evident concern with pure *mise en scène*, Wiener installs himself at his piano, tinkling out medleys of Gershwin and Kern that add to the strong silent-film atmosphere already present in the palmy decor of the Meurice, haunted by the ghosts of aviators, spies and sleeping-car Madonnas.

It is Nicole Garcia's scene, and she carries it off brilliantly. Drawn out by Viva, Elsa admits that she is not at all what she seems, that her name is not even Elsa, but Jeanne, that she was merely 'befriended' by Pierre, and that she is nothing more than a hostess in a cheap dancing ('his said with head cupped low in hands')... a dancing (pause)...

'Viva': Nicole Garcia and Bulle Ogier at the Hotel Meurice





(turns from the camera-lens to stare directly into Viva's face) . . . *Le Rhumba!* Her monologue, like most of the script, was written just a few hours before the take, and it is not only in the choice of the word 'rhumba' that I recognise the amusing, unsettling 'touch' of the film's Argentinian co-scenarist, Eduardo De Gregorio.

Garcia, a newcomer to the *bande à Rivette*, is all nervous tension, barely controlled, in striking contrast to Ogier, whose mannish dress and suave style suggest, to this observer, some odd mixture of George Sand and George Sanders. Here as elsewhere, Lubtchansky's camera is on the move, tracking into Elsa's ghostly features as if to force the confession out of her. It has become obvious that, in terms of camera movement, this (and the other three chapters of *Les Filles du Feu*) will be by far Rivette's most considered work to date, with two principal poles of reference: Mizoguchi for the long takes and Ophüls, of course, for the frequent tracking shots. What this will mean in the context of the completed work is a mystery to me and, I suspect, to some of those most intimate with the project. I am no longer as astonished as I was by the small degree to which Rivette himself appears to participate in the actual shooting. My impression is of a director whose basic decisions have been made, one of which is to employ as little as possible the kind of improvisation for which he is famous—except for the music, which may well affect the playing almost as a good or bad audience will do in the theatre.

This said, Rivette remains Rivette; and the last shot that I witness, in which the two goddesses, Viva and Elizabeth—played, in a gorgeous scarlet cape, by Wiener's daughter Elizabeth—mock the naïve pretensions of mortals, is a good example of how one take will often serve as rehearsal for the next, the actresses accumulating or discarding detail at such a dizzy rate that, once it is over, I find I have no clear recollection of what piece of business is or is not in the final take.

The set is a table for two in one of the smaller salons, a table laden with ice cream, champagne and *petits fours*. Around it the two young women gaily disport themselves—popping corks, feeding each other smeary chocolate éclairs, and making curious 'vroom vroom' noises *à la Kiss Me Deadly*—with Wiener's sprightly accompaniment turning the whole thing into musical chairs. The first take, however, is wretchedly flat, the second a clutter of cute details. It is only with the third that the actresses start to scent out the scene's real possibilities and its rhythm, so much so that they cease, quite spontaneously, to block each other in front of the slowly tracking camera. Rivette does not guide them in either verbal or mimetic fashion, but between takes he will venture to advise against certain inventions and for others, so that, in the end, the shot will doubtless conform to all his first feelings about it.

Whatever else it may be, a film is also the record of its own *tournage*. In Rivette's case, the film set becomes a theatre of imponderables, which shape the result much as a sleeper's movements will govern the nature of his dreams; and from the evidence of interviews one realises that the



'*Le Vengeur*': Eduardo De Gregorio, Kika Markham, Geraldine Chaplin (in blonde wig); on the right, Jacques Rivette and his script girl, Lydie Mahias

only guidelines of a Rivette film are those of *tournage*, the idea of a definitive form, at least until editing begins, being a nonsense. In the past (*L'Amour Fou*, *Out 1*) his overriding concern as a director has been to record the work's gestation, which tempts me to suggest that, though the 'legendary' 13-hour version of *Out 1* may indeed be extraordinary, it must be less so than the six-week version, i.e. the *tournage*. From *Viva*, whose camera movements are plotted out in advance but whose dialogue is written the evening before, whose actors have specific things to do but whose music is improvised, one can have no idea what to expect.

G.A.

### 3

Like any Rivette film, *Le Vengeur* took shape gradually, drawing on a large number of deliberately chosen ideas and as many fortuitous circumstances. As important as Rivette's interest in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (drawn to his attention by Eduardo De Gregorio), and the curious traditions surrounding the period of Carnival, was the availability of Geraldine Chaplin and Bernadette Lafont together with that of a group of dancers from Carolyn Carlson's company. It must be kept in mind that Rivette often conceives a film around particular people; *Céline et Julie* began as 'a film for Juliet Berto'. Any casting decision is consequently of primary importance. Further, the selection of Brittany as a location arose as much from certain union allowances permitting a six day week outside Paris, as from a vague desire to spend some time in the country. Once the different ideas and practical considerations begin to sort themselves out and interact, the narrative itself starts to acquire definition. Even after shooting has begun, however, Rivette is enormously influenced by what he may discover the actors capable of achieving. Finding that an actor is able to do something he hadn't suspected, Rivette might add a scene at the last minute (if, of course, there is time, of

all things the most rare and precious). One of Rivette's talents is his ability to begin rehearsing a scene without any fixed idea of how it will actually be played for the camera. The final outcome is invariably a product of close collaboration with his actors.

In this film, the elements of *mise en scène*, the use of costume, dance, and allusion, are so strikingly disparate that it would almost seem that Rivette purposely set out to amalgamate the most wildly divergent sorts of material. For the most part, the camera movements appeared to suggest an affinity with recent films of Jancsó and with Fellini's procedures in *Roma*, but the things which the camera had to photograph plunge one into the world of De Mille, or even of Raoul Walsh's *Blackbeard the Pirate*. Certainly, the pointedly approximate nature of the costumes and the singular use of décor keep the players and the plot in a curious kind of cinematic limbo. The grating juxtaposition of assorted, eccentrically chosen verse from the play, with scenes that allude strongly to musical comedy, defies an attempt to comprehend the kind of synthesis that might eventually come to bear.

From watching different aspects of the shooting, even for so long a period as ten days, it is impossible to draw conclusions as to the final result. Nor must one rule out an alternative possibility: Rivette may be exploiting sharply contrasting effects in an attempt to keep the viewer in a continual state of discomfort as the gears grind joltingly back and forth. Considering the context, one is reminded of certain Renaissance plays where the tone remains so complex and ambiguous as never to be wholly tragic or wholly comic, where everything seems just barely contiguous, and where audience reactions remain confused and uncertain. There is no room here for improvised bits of dialogue and for the sorts of hesitations and *temps morts* that improvisation produces, effects which have been so remarkably utilised by Rivette in the past. While spontaneity is not sacrificed, the camera movements are of such complexity that great discipline is imposed on the actors.



Furthermore, while Rivette was present during the discussions leading to the creation of the script, he allowed Parolini and De Gregorio enormous freedom. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Rivette relied strongly on material that they were able to provide independently of him. Virtually all the dialogue, with the exception of Tourneur's verse and one brief scene, was invented by the two writers. It seemed an ideal collaboration in the sense that, being intimately familiar with Rivette's work and methods, they were able to stimulate him to try things he might otherwise not have attempted.

In its broad lines, the film deals with a band of pirates led by Giulia (Bernadette Lafont) and infiltrated for purposes of revenge by Morag (Geraldine Chaplin) and her accomplice Erika (Kika Markham). As Morag wreaks havoc among the pirates, it becomes clear that she is a moon goddess waging war with a sun goddess—who is of course Giulia. There is no dearth of violent death; it abounds in the best Jacobean manner, until finally there are no survivors at all. There are drownings and throat-cuttings, poisonings and death by lightning. A special end was invented for Erika, who is mysteriously described as being 'eclipsed'.

The first two weeks of shooting took place in the 15th century Château de la Roche-Jagu. Outside and in, the château had been so reconstructed and patched up that it had the air of having been built by an eccentric millionaire who wished to own a medieval castle as imagined by Paramount or RKO. Apart from this advantage of singularly recalling the Hollywood past, the rooms were large and gave the camera plenty of space in which to move.

While Tourneur's play may have been a starting point for Rivette and his writers, the transformations it underwent at different stages of preparation and shooting are so far-reaching that the play itself is of only minor importance. Rivette has retained the lushness of violence typical of Jacobean horror shows, but he has wandered far from *The Revenger's Tragedy*. At one

point, Morag and Erika present a scene from the play to Giulia and her cohorts, the scene having been chosen because it represents a murder similar to one that they had recently perpetrated on a member of Giulia's band. But even here, the allusion is through Tourneur to *Hamlet*; not only is the play put on before the corrupt little court in the hope of eliciting a violent reaction, but except for a few fragments of verse dredged up by the actresses—bits of one line violently grafted on to bits of another—the scene is presented in dumb show, modified by assorted cries, squeals and gasps. Their recitation is a parody of melodramatic excess; Erika chases Morag around the room, attacking her with a variety of lethal weapons.

Music plays an even more important part in *Le Vengeur* than in *Viva*. Here there are three musicians playing perhaps a dozen instruments between them, from traditional flutes and violins to more exotic instruments from Africa and South America. Their sensitivity is wholly remarkable; again and again their musical choice is exactly right. They articulate the performance admirably and, in turn, are very much influenced by the rhythms and tones of the actors. In the dumb show, they punctuate the actresses' cries, playing music of a marked 17th century colour treated freely in post-Viennese fashion. There is no attempt to conceal them from the camera. In fact they have their own 'costumes', and are often in the frame by themselves.

An afternoon was spent filming a number of reverse shots in which the pirates react to the little play. Their mirth changes to seriousness as they perceive that the death of one of their colleagues is being mocked. Giulia, unlike Claudius, innocent of the deed imitated by Erika and Morag, only begins to enjoy herself when she realises that the play refers to recent events. Together with her two lovers, Jacob (Humbert Balsan) and Ludovico (Larrio Ekson), she laughs morbidly. Appalled at her callousness (and we know from Hollywood films that pirates can be a sensitive lot with a highly developed moral sense), the pirates

rise up spontaneously; but Giulia suppresses this incipient revolt by slitting the throat of a female pirate. This murder called for special effects one doesn't associate with Rivette, although Bulle Ogier bleeds quite a lot in *Céline et Julie*. An elaborate system of rubber tubes and little valves was employed, producing a distressing amount of gore. The victim's screams, while undoubtedly an anatomical impossibility, added to the scene. It was all very horrible and unsettling.

A scene in which lines were drawn directly from Tourneur's play afforded a further glimpse of Rivette's methods in shaping a scene. The actresses had chosen a dozen verses from different scenes in the play that they were to recite as though encouraging each other to see their vendetta through to the end. In one of the attics of the château, beautifully lit to suggest daybreak, Erika and Morag were to pace the length of the room and speak their lines alternately in an incantatory manner, as they approached the camera. When the scene was ready to shoot, Rivette announced his dissatisfaction with the idea. For the next two hours the scene was discussed and slowly took an entirely different form; the principle of singsong recitation was wholly abandoned, and the lines were spoken much as they might be on the English stage. While Morag paced nervously back and forth, Erika sat on a bed, in an attitude of dejection. Both actresses spoke their lines with great intensity, accompanied by highly wrought little sounds from the musicians. The effect was far more austere than the more ritualistic initial idea; and extremely dramatic.

M.G.

#### 4

June 25-29: Fort La Latte, a 12th century fortress near St. Cast on the Brittany coast—entered by a drawbridge and surrounded by sea which is white and foamy against the rocks, green and translucent by the shore, blue and hazy in the distance. The last time a movie crew took over this spectacular location was nearly twenty years ago, for *The Vikings*, and a few placards from that invasion still linger in a nearby shed.

In comparison with what I watched three months ago, *Le Vengeur* (again, a tentative title) seems even wilder and more disturbing; in its clash of foreign elements, a somewhat bigger risk and dare. The crew is the same as on *Viva*, the cast much more varied in terms of background and experience: Markham was Anne, the more worldly of the sisters in Truffaut's *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*; Chaplin has worked for directors as different as Saura, Lean and Altman; Lafont is a seasoned New Wave and *Out 1* veteran. Among Giulia's band, four members are played by dancers, including Arno (Anne-Marie Reynaud), her lieutenant, while Anne-Marie Fijal, a pianist, plays her jester Fiao; Balsan was Gauvain in Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* and Danièle Rosencranz was the female lead in Chabrol's *Une Partie de Plaisir*; the part of Elisa, a teenage pirate, is taken by Elizabeth Medvecky, Lafont's daughter.

Rather than try to be inclusive or to impose a continuity over several days of shooting, I will restrict myself to two of the more elaborate scenes I saw being filmed

On the battlements: duellists (Larrio Ekson, Humbert Balsan) and musicians (Daniel Ponsard, Robert Cohen-Solal, Jean Cohen-Solal)





inside the fortress. But it might be relevant to quote two passages from a prospectus about *Les Filles du feu* written by Rivette a few months ago (the translation is mine):

'The ambition of these films is to invent a new approach to film acting, where speech, pared down to essential phrases, precise formulae, would play a role of 'poetic' punctuation. Neither a return to silent cinema nor pantomime nor choreography: something else, where the movement of bodies, their counterpoint and inscription in the space of the screen, will be the basis of *mise en scène*.'

'To create by the movements of their bodies their own space, to take possession of and traverse the spaces imposed by the decor and the camera's field, to move and act within (and in function to) the simultaneous musical space: these are the three parameters according to which our actresses and actors will attempt to work.'

*On the battlements:* Giulia's 'reply' to Morag and Erika's enactment of the scene from Tourneur is to stage a nasty bit of theatre of her own—a swordfight between Jacob and Ludovico designed to convince Erika, who loves Jacob, that it is real. This is a pivotal scene in which Morag loses Erika as an accomplice, but I am around only for its preliminary stages, which consume parts of two separate afternoons of shooting and are disquieting enough in themselves.

The scene begins with Jacob and Ludovico entering from one side of the battlements, passing the musicians on their way, and rehearsing their swordfight—a rehearsal which Balsan and Ekson have been rehearsing in their spare time, with a trainer, over the past few days—before they retreat to a corner and rest. The camera pans with them throughout except for when they first take their positions, when it tracks away from them, moving approximately from medium to long shot.

The next two shots, running about 90 seconds each, follow the entrances of Morag, Arno and Fiao and their frolics as they play blindman's buff in the same spot occupied by the rehearsed fight, with Morag as the blindfolded victim; the camera tracking as they dance about. Although Chaplin can see through her black blindfold, this is not apparent to the off-camera bystanders when she enters, and there are several unnerving instants when she nearly topples over the edge of the vertiginous battlements as Arno and Fiao buffet her about like malicious children.

The musicians have been improvising visibly throughout the sequence, between as well as during each of the takes, so that each run-through of a shot becomes appreciably different from the one preceding it. In the next shot, also running close to 90 seconds, their apparent autonomy from the action is given a disconcerting wrench when Elisa enters, a mischievous grin on her face, and playfully hits a gong and taps a conga drum as she passes them. (A day later, I learn from one of the musicians that this was Rivette's idea.) Behind her come Erika and Giulia, and a flute starts to play over the light percussion; the camera pans back to frame their entrance, finally settling on Erika as she stares blankly into space.

A stationary set-up shows Ludovico step up behind her with his sword, ready to



*In the dungeon: ghosts Erika (Kika Markham) and Morag (Geraldine Chaplin)*

provoke the fight, and jab her in the back. She cries out sharply, as though waking from a nightmare, spins around and steps to one side. By now it is the second afternoon, and a strong, flappy wind comes over the battlements from the sea (a few hours ago, it gave a love scene between Morag and Jacob on a hillside a distinct *Wuthering Heights* flavour); the mood is tense and edgy, and the musicians' playing becomes increasingly ceremonial in sound from one take to the next, suggesting some sort of blood sacrifice...

*In the dungeon:* Morag and Erika enter and stalk round the body of Morag's dead brother Shane—who, for reasons that are unexplained, looks exactly like Jacob and is played by the same actor—reciting lines from Tourneur (in English) which they will subsequently use in the scene that they stage for Giulia and her band. This time their delivery is strictly incantatory and ritualistic, their voices overlapping as Erika echoes Morag, repeating the same edited speech several times:

Now to my tragic business.

I have not fashioned this only for show  
And useless property; no, it shall be a part  
E'en in its own revenge. This very skull,  
With this drug,

The mortal curse of the earth shall be  
revenged.

The musicians play off-camera in a cramped chamber behind the bright lights being used in this dank interior, stopping and starting their dirge—a drawling bowed bass and a cymbal struck with mallets—in accordance with the simultaneous pauses of Chaplin and Markham in their recitation and pacing. This accompaniment becomes increasingly hypnotic through all five takes, and I'm hardly surprised to hear from Markham afterwards that she wasn't even aware of the music playing, so completely had it become absorbed by and blended into the action of the scene.

The separate circular trajectories of the actresses round the body on the floor—wrapped from head to foot in sailcloth—and a hammock made of chains which hangs beside it, are complex indeed, and my efforts to trace them in my notebook lead to an impenetrable jumble. Each take improves on the last as Rivette slows the action down and stretches it out: the first runs for 112 seconds, the last for 140. The script-girl informs me that the longest take in the film so far is 230 seconds; but this is nothing compared to a few separate shots of Michael Lindsay's theatre group in the 13-hour, 16 mm *Out 1*, which apparently ran over ten times longer.

The shot ends with both actresses kneeling beside the body and Morag drawing out her knife (there are some smiles from the crew each time Rivette says 'Cut'). In the next shot, which shows them tearing apart the fabric to look at Shane, the camera assumes a low angle and becomes mobile, pushed forward on wheels in a path which somewhat resembles an inverted S—beginning at the top end of the figure and proceeding towards Shane's features in horizontal profile before panning up to Morag's face—a manoeuvre that requires Markham to move out of her position silently when the camera approaches. No music this time, only the sound of ripping cloth as Balsan in his heavy corpse make-up gets unveiled through several retakes...

As Michael Graham suggests above, Rivette's route into a scene is often trial by error, and it appears that his customary method of composing a plot with his writers is to ask for a string of suggestions, systematically rejecting each of them until he arrives at what he likes. When I ask Geraldine Chaplin about his manner of directing performances, she describes a process which again seems similar: 'Rivette is very positive that he doesn't know what he wants. But he knows what he *doesn't* want—and he's very particular, too. He's very tough. You have to invent thirty-five different ideas and show them to him like you were selling carpets, and then he says, "Okay, do that." But it's exhausting.'

This kind of aggressive passivity has led to a different formula for group collaboration on each of his projects, but in each case it appears to be grounded in the habits of a spectator-critic, a person more accustomed to watching and evaluating what he sees than to creating something *ex nihilo* for someone else to see—a desire to experiment which seems born out of sheer curiosity, the question 'What would happen if...?' Perhaps this is why he usually places so much importance on editing, where questions can be asked and asked again. It will be interesting to see how much he *can* do with editing in these films, when so much of the footage is composed of long takes, the plots are extremely dense, and there evidently isn't enough material to make lengthy features out of them. Whatever emerges, one suspects that it will only extend the questions about authorship that each of his films since *L'Amour Fou* has raised.

The closer emphasis and attention in *Les Filles du feu* on framing, composition, camera movements, actors' movements and all the other physical co-ordinates of *mise en scène* will undoubtedly produce some changes in what we suppose a 'Rivette film' to be, and in the process will likely raise more questions about many things than they begin to resolve. The excitement and adventure of a Rivette project is quite literally that of a leap into the unknown—a form of suspense and suspension that begins when it is first conceived, grows and deepens while it is being filmed and edited, obstinately persists well past the point when the film is completed, continuing in the mind of each spectator who sees it and interrogates it in his own fashion.



David L.  
Overbey

# FRITZ LANG'S CAREER GIRL



Fritz Lang

*'If death settled everything it would be too easy . . . Where would justice be if death settled everything. It would be very convenient to be a man under such circumstances.'*

*'God did not put love in man's heart for him to be ashamed of it.'*

—Liliom (Fritz Lang, 1934)

Like every major director, Fritz Lang has had projects throughout his career which were never filmed. The estimated number varies with each published study of his work, most of which Lang finds wildly inaccurate; it remains for the authorised study of Lang by Lotte Eisner, to be published next year by Secker and Warburg, to separate definitively the truth from the myths. Still, a small number of such projects (about four or five) were indeed real. While some were ideas which stopped just the other side of title registration, others survive in one or another degree of completion as scripts or scenarios. Working with any Lang script of a finished film is a great joy, for it is replete with notes in Lang's hand concerning editing, sound, camera movement and placement, often accompanied by his own careful drawings for sets and camera. As much as such scripts can carry one to the heart of the creative process, however, in many ways an unfiled scenario brings one even closer to the very beginnings of a film, to its germinative source. While Lang never failed to modify even a fully realised script, it is through those unfiled scenarios which he alone wrote—unhindered by fights with producers and the vagaries of casting—that one can most directly approach his personal vision, the themes and ideas which concerned him most at critical points in his career. Viewed in this light, one of the most important of these is *Death of a Career Girl*, which Lang seriously considered coming out of retirement to make as his final film.

*Death of a Career Girl* came about simply enough. In 1964, while serving as President of the Jury at Cannes, Lang received a note from Jeanne Moreau indicating that she would very much like to work with him.

His first reaction was to answer that he had no intention of making another film; but an idea with which he had been toying for some time came to mind again, for it seemed to fit Moreau's particular abilities. The

This essay is a condensed and somewhat modified version of part of the introduction to the complete scenario of Fritz Lang's unfiled project *Death of a Career Girl*. The scenario is soon to be published in a volume containing, as well, the scripts of Lang's *Scarlet Street* and *Woman in the Window*.

scenario itself, if not the idea, was begun in Mannheim in 1964, continued in Frankfurt and Paris, and completed in Beverly Hills in 1965.\* While there are as many reasons for a project's cancellation as there are projects, *Death of a Career Girl* was primarily a victim of constantly conflicting schedules of the would-be participants. Financial difficulties, for once, played no real part in the abrupt cancellation of the film after the public announcement of its imminent launching.

The scenario exists in three languages: the German and English versions are directly by Lang himself; the French translation was done from the German by Howard Vernon. This essay is based on the original English version, which contains several important passages absent from the French translation and therefore presumably from the German scenario as well, although I have had no opportunity to read the latter. Passages are quoted from the scenario (which is both copyrighted and registered with the Writers Guild of America, West, Inc. by Fritz Lang) with the kind permission of Mr. Lang.

The scenario consists of eight sequences, moving chronologically from 1943 to 1966, and two framing sequences set in 1966.

I. In Paris, a beautiful and financially successful business woman moves, drink in hand, through her luxury apartment, takes an automatic pistol from a safe, and begins to reflect on her life.

II. Working in 1943 with the Maquis, the woman, then sixteen, sleeps with a Nazi officer in order to solicit information that will save the life of an RAF pilot, all the time biting a small gold cross hanging round her neck in order not to cry. Afterwards she is raped by twenty of her drunken comrades in the resistance.

III. Unable to forget, she encounters the pilot by chance a year later in Capri, and sleeps with him 'perhaps because of compassion, or loneliness, or weariness . . . or simply because she cannot stand hearing any longer that he "loves" her.' When he awakens the next morning she has left with half his money.

IV. Not quite a year later in Rome (the 'City of God'), she is pregnant but too poor to procure an abortion. A boy is born. She first attempts to smother him, changes her mind, places the gold cross about his neck and leaves him before a convent door. She

\*One critic has suggested that *Death of a Career Girl* was merely another version of *Behind Closed Doors*, 'revised for the opposite gender' to fit Miss Moreau. As the earlier project is one of those that falls into the questionable category, as the plot details as handed down in critical gossip differ widely from *Career Girl*, and as the critic in question never saw any unpublished material by Lang, one can safely assume that *Career Girl* is not a rewrite of anything.



is almost run over by a carload of wealthy Italian youths and their well-dressed, laughing whores, whose gay life she envies bitterly.

V. Later, in Paris, she takes on low-paying, menial jobs, before becoming a 'try-on' girl at a fashion house where, in order to keep her job, she moves from bed to bed, although she is now totally indifferent to sex. Wondering why she doesn't simply surrender herself to common prostitution, by chance she becomes the model for artist Richard Feling. Twenty years older than she, and a painter of great talent and integrity, Feling treats her with kindness. He teaches her all he knows of the social graces, and assists her in educating herself generally. They become friends; later, lovers. As his mistress, she begins to feel something akin to love for him, is frightened by this unaccustomed emotion and retreats. Snubbed by his fashionable friends, and motivated strongly by her own ambition, she leaves him.

VI. She marries a rich industrialist and uses his wealth to gain entrance to the power centres of society and big business. Realising that her husband is unable to help her further, she takes an even wealthier lover, Raoul. After an argument during which she scornfully laughs at her husband, she perceives that he would like to see her dead. She then plots to make it appear that her husband has tried to kill her. The plot succeeds and the husband kills himself.

VII. She becomes Raoul's mistress and learns the secrets of his business empire. In Paris she attends an exhibition of Feling's paintings. His arthritis has forced him to cease all work. They speak intimately and Feling, still in love with her, warns her that she is in mortal danger of losing her soul. Their meeting changes nothing, for she uses her relationship with Raoul to take over his empire, thus destroying him.

VIII. Now at the height of her power, she holds court in Paris for the successful in all areas of human endeavour. Her apartment is fully equipped with hidden recording devices which monitor conversations at her parties, through which she consolidates her position and gains even more power. She decides to produce an heir, and seduces a somewhat unwilling Feling. During her pregnancy, the opportunity to take control of an international cartel by adding one small company to her holdings presents itself, but she will need all her considerable sex appeal to triumph. An abortion. The newspapers announce the death of Feling. While there is speculation that it was suicide, 'she knows: he simply could no longer live.'

IX. She is racked with something like guilt, and her frenzied attempts to forget lead her from city to city in a round of drugs, drink and indiscriminate sex. One evening in Rome, numbingly drunk, she goes to bed with a young Italian. Waking in the morning, she finds about the neck of her sleeping lover a chain with a small gold cross bearing her own teeth marks.

X. Returning to the present, she steps into her bath, razor blade in her hand, ready to kill herself. Her valet announces that the officers of her company have arrived. The razor blade drops slowly to the bottom of the tub. She declares the meeting open.

Several problems now seem to arise. Doubtless, much of the plot can be termed melodramatic; the coincidental incest which brings about the career girl's epiphany most obviously so. Several responses to this 'problem' are possible, none of them mutually exclusive. First, it is necessary to remember that any summary of any fiction, particularly of a scenario, will tend to throw basic plot devices into relief while fading subtleties into the background. If one trusts the teller before the tale, it is clear that with the fleshing out of the material through detail and dialogue, as well as through Lang's inevitable modifications, all given incidents would have reassumed their relative dimensions of importance within the design and texture of the dramatic fabric.

Lang has worked with melodramatic material before, using the strong sensations engendered by the situations both to excite and involve his audience, at the same time moulding the material—often working visually against the melodramatic grain—to create an atmosphere of moral ambiguity which pushes the material upwards from the level of mere sensation. This method can be seen at work from *Die Spinnen* and the early Mabuse films, through the American thrillers, to the Indian films and the last Mabuse. Lang was an early and avid reader of Edgar Wallace and is still interested in popular thrillers (many of whose plots more and more resemble the newspapers he devours daily). Only one of his legacies to Langian directors like Chabrol is the realisation that riches are to be mined from popular melodrama for films which, with the proper treatment, will work on several levels at once.

Knowing the genesis of *Career Girl*, it is difficult not to 'see' the Moreau of 1964 in the role. In some ways, of course, this helps to visualise the work, but in other, more important ways, the image of the actress can obscure our understanding of Lang's intentions. The difference between seeing the project as a film written for Jeanne Moreau and as a film written with the actress in mind is not, I think, a mere matter of emphasis; the difference is, after all, between a Lang film and a Moreau vehicle.

It is no secret that Lang has always liked and been fascinated by women. Generally speaking, the women in his films are stronger, for good or evil, than those of most other directors, especially those who worked in America—Bette Davis, Joan Crawford and Rosalind Russell notwithstanding. The figure of the *femme fatale*, appearing as early as *Die Spinnen*, turns up again and again as a constant motif in his work; thus the career girl is less an outgrowth of the chance encounter at Cannes than of previous portraits of women. Kriemhild, one of the earlier versions, also pursued a goal to its logical, destructive end, shedding all human emotions save that of revenge (a form, after all, of ambition), leaving more than one dead man behind her, and finally destroying herself in the process. Indeed, Kriemhild is perhaps Lang's most deadly, self-deadening and archetypically powerful female figure. She too rejects maternal feelings and romantic love; to remain indifferent to Etzel the Hun required, after all, such icy determination as even the career girl might be incapable of achieving. The most immediate antecedent of the career girl is



Two of Fritz Lang's more fatal women. Margaret Schöön as Kriemhild; Joan Bennett in 'Scarlet Street'

Marion Menil in *Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse*. Using her sexual powers to attempt a takeover of Henry Travers' financial empire, Marion has, however, been hypnotised into working for Dr. Jordan. The spell is broken ultimately by her human emotion, which allows her to save both Travers and herself, thus escaping the fate of Kriemhild and the career girl. Such salvation is more typical of Lang's women, as can be seen in Sonja (*Spione*), Mae Doyle (*Clash by Night*) and Debby Marsh (*The Big Heat*).

The career girl, indeed, resembles Dr. Jordan or even Mabuse himself, on a smaller



scale. She even uses many of the same electronic devices as Jordan in the last Mabuse film:

'Her walls have ears,  
every word is recorded.  
The hour after midnight  
is not only the traditional hour of ghosts and  
"ghouls and ghosties,  
"long-legged beasties,  
"and things that go bump in the night",  
it starts also  
the dangerous hours of senseless discussions.  
When inhibitions have been successfully  
drowned in alcohol, or at least subdued by  
too rich food,  
when too many cigarettes—(not necessarily  
doped)—  
have effectively fogged the so-called thinking  
apparatus,  
the human animal loves to indulge  
in the atavistic pastime  
trying to find The Answer:  
because  
deep inside  
they are scared to hell by the very thought  
that there is no answer,  
never has been,  
never will be.  
Strange subjects are discussed in this search  
for The Answer:  
Zen,  
the scrolls of the Dead Sea  
and communistic manifestos  
and health food and astrology  
and nudism and nihilism  
and Freud and Jung, too.  
All this is recorded,  
though it is of no interest to her.  
But the magic after-midnight-hours  
affect other people too,  
trick the wise money-boys into dropping their  
cautiously built-up safeguards  
and baiting the hook with vanity,  
make them whisper—  
(even at these late hours  
only behind palms, carefully held before  
tight-lipped mouths)—about  
Stock Exchange tips,  
market riggings,  
secretly planned industrial  
transactions and mergers.  
And these are the only things that are of  
interest to her,  
so she gains her uncanny  
knowledge of business affairs—  
so she constantly enlarges  
the industrial empire  
she had taken from Raoul . . .'

These secret recordings in *Career Girl* closely parallel those in *Tausend Augen*, and are negatively related to the positive values of respect, trust and the right of individual privacy. Denying love, the career girl inhabits a world in which personal advantage is taken whenever and however possible, with no thought to the rights of others to speak openly and without fear of reprisal on any level. What the career girl does, of course, is to incorporate on the personal and business planes those techniques which Lang had ascribed earlier to Mabuse. From the animated dreams in *Die Nibelungen* (telling the truth), to the newsreels in *Fury* (telling an ambiguous truth), to the portrait of Kitty March in *Scarlet Street* (mocking the truth), to the television images of *Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* and the eavesdropping career girl (recording the truth for evil ends), one can follow the progress of the perversion of the image in the modern world as sadly but accurately observed by Fritz Lang. In *Career Girl*, it is even more horrifying because the corruption

is no longer that of a master criminal working on a grandly mad scale, but of a private citizen, a zombie-like version of each of us, spying on her fellows for personal gain, at once both symptom and cause of her agonising death-in-life.

The career girl is not the first character in Lang's films to be consigned to an earthly hell without hope of redemption, although she may be the first woman to be so damned.\* Christopher Cross, for example, in *Scarlet Street*, like the career girl, must continue to live with the enormity of the crime he has committed, unable to communicate enough even to confess and thus gain that sort of expiation. He too is cut off from his fellows in an isolation which the startling image makes brilliantly clear. Even his attempt at suicide fails, although this is the result more of bad luck and ineptitude than of that chilling moral indifference which leaves the career girl unwilling to turn the edge of her razor to her wrists.

Here, however, we are on shifting ground. In that section of the scenario dealing with the death of Feling, Lang wrote: 'Was it an accident, or had he taken his own life? As

for Lang she has already sinned against the Holy Spirit; there is no doubt, at any rate, that by the end of the last page of the scenario she is truly damned.

One would normally tend to avoid touching on religious problems in an otherwise secular film, except that there are signs that Lang himself partially conceived *Career Girl* in such terms. For example, there is still hope of salvation for the girl early on in Rome—called, only semi-ironically, the 'City of God'—where she is unable to smother her baby because she suddenly remembers the Biblical greeting of the angel to Mary: 'Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.' She places the small cross about the neck of her child to protect him from pain as it prevented her from crying out during her ordeal with the Nazi. Later the same cross forces her to confront the consequences of her actions, not just specifically her incest, but throughout her life. The possibilities for that sophisticated irony of which Lang is a master are obviously manifold.

There are abundant clues as to what the film would have looked like had it been



'Spione' (1928): Gerda Maurus, Rudolf Klein-Rogge

if it mattered. People have the right to die whenever they wish.' To affirm a belief in man's freedom of choice, however, is not necessarily to suggest that there is a moral justification for suicide. Certainly, no matter how extreme the situation, there has never been a suicide in a Lang film. Since he has never denied his early Catholic education, one is tempted to conclude that suicide is, for Lang, an untenable solution to any problem. Nor, of course, can one be absolutely certain that the career girl is beyond redemption, save that since her continual denial of what is human in herself is *per se* a form of spiritual suicide, perhaps

\*Susan Spencer in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* is a possible exception, although her situation, as Lang has often pointed out, is morally ambiguous enough to raise doubts about the state of her soul. Certainly she lacks that self-perception which causes the career girl to suffer the pangs of the damned; that very lack, however, might well make Susan even more dangerous, at least to others. Another possible exception is Alice Reed in *Woman in the Window*, but we are not told enough about her to do more than make a guess.

filmed. In a 1968 essay, 'Ameublement et Caractère', written for Leon Barsacq's *Le Décor de Film*, Lang wrote: 'For me as a director, the furnishings are more important than the four actual walls (of a set), for the furnishings as a whole, or even more, certain details, should reflect the character who lives in that décor . . . a single antique in an interior otherwise absolutely modern, or even a painting on a wall, can tell an audience about the intimate character of the person who lives there.' Consider, then, how much one already knows about the career girl merely from the description of her apartment in the first dialogue-less sequence:

'The beautiful woman, perhaps thirty-seven—or a little over—but looking much younger, stands with her back to a wide unlit fireplace . . . alone in the huge, half-darkened room . . . Gleaming chromium furniture, straight-back Gothic chairs, sombre Renaissance chests, frivolous Louis XV commodes . . . an almost professional bar.

'On the walls, paintings: two Modiglianis, one Braque, one Picasso (blue period), one Chagall. Through a half-open French door,



a beam of light, cold, business-like and irregular, mechanical buzzing, breaking off and starting anew . . . Loud ringing of the telephone drowns it for a few seconds . . . The woman ignores it.

Her evening gown, provocatively décolleté, is a creation by Balenciaga. A half-empty glass of Scotch in her hand, she stares straight ahead then . . . moves slowly towards a dark Renaissance chest. Carved by craftsmen four hundred years ago, the front panel shows the Second Station, the Redeemer carrying His cross . . . the telephone keeps ringing . . .

She pays no attention to it, puts her glass on the chest, alongside another one standing in a little pool of water, caused by condensed moisture due to the ice that had been aside, now melted. From an inlaid Moroccan box, she takes a cigarette, lights it, inhales deeply, throws it into her own glass where it fizzes out . . . Picking up the other glass, she crosses to the French door . . . the telephone is ringing impatiently . . .

The adjoining room is filled with the buzzing, rattling, mechanical sounds. Steel furniture around a long, triangular conference table, covered with green baize cloth, carafes of water, white scratch pads, pencils, stacks of business papers. Filing cabinets

light falling into the room, the 'cold, business-like and irregular buzzing', and even the persistent, unanswered phone as expressions of the state of the soul of the room's inhabitant. Again, however, one must be careful. In spite of Lang's emphasis on the importance of décor, he has also maintained often enough that it would be an error to see symbols in every object in a film or to relate specific ideas to certain images too quickly. During a conversation with him concerning Susan Spencer's character in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, I suggested that she was ethically suspect from the first moment we see her because of her slouched posture in the chic black cocktail dress and hat which she wears so inappropriately to a business office in the middle of the afternoon. Lang laughed, suggesting that this was an example of *hineingeheimlesen*.<sup>†</sup> Then, relenting a bit, he suggested that he was the last person to talk about such things, since quite enough had gone into his films directly from his subconscious, and he would rather that others interpreted the films.

One must remember, however, Lang's

tions of a script already set were minor. Certainly the fundamental meaning was never changed. For *Death of a Career Girl*, Lang wrote only such dialogue as he thought central and indispensable to the film. One need not retrace his career very far back to find the germinal situation that was in part the source for the crucial long speech by Richard Feling which serves as a basic statement of the film's theme. While he was making the two Indian films, there was an argument over the script. Lang insisted that Chandra would allow Seeta and Harold Berger freedom within the palace if Berger gave his word of honour that he would not attempt to escape. The producer and the co-scenarist argued that modern audiences would never accept such an idea, that they would merely laugh. Since Lang regards honesty as the first of human virtues, this cynical attitude shocked him. It was then, he says, that he found himself in the unpleasant and saddening position of being able to write that 'Today, love has become a four-letter word.' In the scenario, Feling has returned with the career girl to her apartment to have a drink, to talk, and perhaps to rekindle their once mutual warmth:

Feling continues, still tenderly, affectionately, but also very matter-of-factly.

'Long before you were born in 1914 the lights were going out in Europe. (And till now they weren't lit up again.) Today, I'm afraid, love is going out, not only here . . . in the whole world . . . and God knows if He will ever be able to get love back to His creation.'

Now she replies, angrily, bitter: 'Love . . . —LOVE! LUST! . . .!'

And she adds, sneeringly: 'With all the men I went to bed with I was as much personally involved as one of those rubber dolls sailors buy in Japanese ports! Love . . .!'

'I know,' Feling says calmly, 'I know, love has become a four-letter word. Love—that's a word no playwright dares to use on the stage these days . . . it makes people laugh . . . perhaps in shame, because they're no longer capable of it, when economic matters are to them much more important, overwhelming everything. Perhaps people still long for love, but lack the courage . . .

'And talking of four-letter words, there is another one: SOUL—God forbid! And yet—there is that which is called the SOUL, that which defies definition and, though not admittedly, is felt by everyone. If we stunt the SOUL so that it dries up and finally dies, then we are dead . . .

'Oh yes . . . we eat, we drink, we go to bed and "make love"—but our life is wasted . . . We are dead and don't even know it.'

Had the film been made, Lang would have returned full circle, back to *Der Müde Tod*, but with a startling difference. In that film, arguably the most personal of the director's European work, the figure of Death seeks to demonstrate that he is stronger than love. The final point of the film, of course, is quite the opposite, for the two lovers eventually triumph (a motif echoed later by Eddy and Joan in *You Only Live Once*) by being joined together in a life beyond death. Forty-four years later, Lang found himself reversing that motif exactly. If death were exhausted then, it is love which is exhausted in *Death of a Career Girl*. It is perfect Langian irony that two deaths should equal a 'happy ending', and that an ending with the protagonist alive, beautiful and 'successful' should be the saddest in any of his work.



'Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse' (1960): Gert Fröhe, Wolfgang Preiss

along the walls, running teletype machines, a computer. The conference room of a business tycoon.'

While the sequence is much longer than this excerpt, we already have enough. The steel, angular furniture among the antiques (the carving of the Redeemer bearing His cross is an interesting touch in light of the small gold cross to come), the fireplace without a fire, the lack of full light in the room: all contribute to the portrait of a woman with the sort of taste that money can buy, but without a spark of humanity which would make the room come alive. Even the paintings on the wall are suspect. Later we have something of a thumbnail critique of her collection by Richard Feling: 'The Braque is weak, Picasso is better today than he was then; but the Chagall is stunning.\*'

One is also tempted to define the slab of

highly developed sense of irony. He has confirmed the truth of the story, for example, that he spent the better part of an afternoon arranging the folds of Joan Bennett's negligée for a scene in *Scarlet Street* so that it hung precisely right as the light hit it. He did indeed clean the floor of the set after it had already been swept and scrubbed during the shooting of the same film, because the light was not reflecting exactly as he wished it to. Considering the care he took with the composition of each image, would it really be *hineingeheimlesen* to attempt to find function and meaning in the uses of sound and light in a scenario untouched by other minds than his own?

Nor is Lang less careful with dialogue. While both he and actors he has worked with have told me that on rare occasions he changed a bit of dialogue if the actor was unable to speak it naturally, such modifica-

\*All Richard Feling's dialogue, as well as the role itself, assumes immediate centrality when one understands that 'Richard Feling' is an anagram for Friedrich (i.e. Fritz) Lang. I am, of course, indebted to Mr. Lang himself for pointing this out to me.

<sup>†</sup>*Hineingeheimlesen* appears to be an invented word in the German manner. While there is no one word English equivalent, it literally means to 'read secrets into', secrets which, by implication, are not there to read.





# Observations on Keaton's STEAMBOAT BILL JR.

E. Rubinstein

When he was working on *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* in 1927, Buster Keaton did not yet know that this was to be the last film to come from his own studio, that he was about to find himself sold bodily to Metro, that the Metro lot was to serve as the vast graveyard of his talents. Yet *Steamboat Bill* does read like a final chapter, for along with *The Cameraman*, his first Metro feature\* and the last of the great Keaton features, it carries to summation the story of its author's accomplishment; our knowledge that these two films also ironically preface the long chronicle of Keaton's imprisonment and decline only intensifies their claim on our attention and on our feelings.

## STORY

Keaton's addiction to his scrupulously well-made plots grew out of his awareness that the most astonishing comic invention demands the most conventional of dramatic contexts. But as this awareness apparently intensified over the years, it also began to threaten to limit his work. In *Seven Chances* (1925) and *Battling Butler* (1926) the plot exacts too much of our attention, repeatedly subduing Buster to its complex needs, cheating us of occasions to watch the Keaton body at work. (Appropriately, it's in these two films that Buster is subjected to bodily brutalities that some find intolerable: the beatings in the ring in *Battling Butler*, the confrontation with the barbed wire in *Seven Chances*.)

\*I am ignoring *The Saphead*, which Keaton made for Metro in 1920 between his departure from the Arbuckle company and the first of his own two-reelers.

In *The General* (1926) Keaton has conquered the problem with a success no one could have anticipated. Here the plot attains a Euclidean harmony of shape even as it forces its protagonist again and again to explore the very limits of his own physical resourcefulness; the tension between the demands of the action and the possibilities of the actor is flawlessly maintained over eight reels. So it is, perhaps, that the succeeding film, *College* (1927), is the most nearly episodic of the major Keaton features. Perfection of form, attained in *The General*, no longer seems a challenge. Yes, even in *College* the familiar narrative framework is present: the given situation demands a hero but instead gets a Buster; a Buster under pressure finally explodes into a hero unparalleled and so settles the situation. But the narrative framework is present as if only to permit discrete and self-contained illustrations of Keaton's bodily pyrotechnics, and the

nature of these illustrations is fixed more nearly by the range of extracurricular activities college students may most likely pursue (athletics, part-time jobs) than by any internal demands of narrative sequence: whether a soda-jerk sequence will precede or follow this or that demonstration of virtuoso athletic incompetence is now determined mainly by Keaton's sense of how best to space his laughs.

*Steamboat Bill* offers neither the narrative tautness of *The General* nor the comfortable narrative looseness of *College*; it is the work of a maker of comedies once again at peace with his chosen conventions. Because the protagonist is Buster, his father, seeing the long-absent son of his dreams return from the East in the person of an effete runt, will instantly withdraw his love. His girl will turn out to be the daughter of his father's rival steamboat operator. His home town on the Mississippi will prove a place where all his New England college refinements will seem a nasty joke either on his relations or on himself. And then, the pattern of ruination being as ineluctably logical in *Steamboat Bill* as in *King Lear*, his home town will be physically destroyed by a terrible storm. Since, however, he inhabits a world without reason, he will manage to rescue from the subsequent flood everyone who counts in the plot. Father and child, swain and beloved, even sworn business enemies



will be momentarily reconciled. In the last shot, capitalising on this instant of harmony, he will salvage a preacher floating past in order to have the hard-won peace certified by a marriage ceremony. So it is, so precisely, we feel, it must be, in a Keaton movie. One reward of *Steamboat Bill* is an entirely satisfactory sense of the sheer inevitability of its events.

## MOOD

If Sennett liberated comedy from the fixed arena of the stage, Keaton, more than anyone else, took it upon himself to explore the implications of what Sennett had done, using the film frame to show what it must mean to operate in a world where danger lies not only within the frame but without, the world any single frame excludes but does not deny. The cyclone sequence of *Steamboat Bill* completes Keaton's explorations.

Lying in a hospital bed, Buster awakens to discover the roof quite gone. His bed travels through the spaces of a town undergoing devastation. He is blown into a stable, into a half-wrecked theatre, into every mysterious corner of what remains of the town. He tries to walk, to creep, to fly into the wind. He stands stock still as the façade of a building falls on top of him—or rather all around him, for the space of earth on which he has innocently planted his feet receives the portion of the façade that once held an open window barely wider than his own shoulders. In the past, Buster has confronted landslides and stampedes and waterfalls and always found his own way to the end of the movie; but even Buster has never known anything like this.

And all in awful silence. From the beginning Keaton understood the range of comic possibilities of cinematic silence. Sometimes the joke is on Buster: a door unexpectedly slams shut, Buster jumps, we laugh—and we laugh all the harder when Buster is alone on the screen and it therefore appears to us that Buster alone in the universe has heard the frightening sound. At other times Keaton's emphasis is different. We laugh in *The General* when a weirdly beautiful monomaniac chops wood atop a train even as an enemy army, moving implacably to the right of the frame as the train moves implacably to the left, silently engulfs him. But here the joke turns on us. Though we offer excuses different from Buster's—he was (we guess) distracted by the roar of his engine and his own intentness on the job before him, while we were distracted by the silence of Keaton's medium—we have in a sense participated in his error: at best we may have heard a piano in a movie theatre playing martial music, but like Buster himself we have surely failed to hear an army.

In the cyclone sequence silence belongs not only to the immediate gag but to a pervasive terror, for here Keaton more frequently and more appallingly than anywhere else plays another of his favoured games, that of suggesting that poor Buster has fallen prey to our inability to hear what's happening. The building falls, but it certainly does not crash: Buster reacts only when he finally sees the rubble. We laugh as a dreadful wind arrives without a hint and

Buster, amazed, faces squarely into it. But from somewhere beyond the frame another dreadful wind may be plotting its arrival, and Buster apparently can't trust his own ears to help him get ready. The humour of silence now encompasses the nightmare of deafness.

## PICTURES

Though there seems little truth to the easy assumption that the imagery of the great films of the 1920s is the function of their want of words—the styles of Welles and Antonioni and Franju were not formed in the days of silence—with Keaton silence and expressiveness of image do seem part of a single ontological condition. We can't know how Keaton's visual style would have been affected by sound had he enjoyed in the 1930s the freedom that was his a decade before. But we can see that *Steamboat Bill*, again like *The Cameraman*, displays a mastery of *mise-en-cadre* which no other comedies have equalled.\*

The difficulty lies in choosing only a few illustrations from a film in which every important shot so persuades our eyes of its seemingly effortless aptness. There are, as always, the spectacular moments: think of Buster, poised like a statue, apparently pondering something else amid all the silence, as the building lands on all sides of him; think of Buster, his feet clawing the earth to which the rest of him is virtually parallel, leaning into a cyclone. As always at such moments, Keaton knows that what the actor is up to is so extraordinary that the camera must record it from a proper distance and without comment. (Without elaborate comment, at any rate; placing Buster far to the right of the frame in the second of the shots I've described, thus filling the screen with sheer wind, is indeed making a point.) But at least for me, it's in moments less intrinsically compelling, moments that would otherwise serve only the needs of exposition, that Keaton's camera eye asserts its power most tellingly.

The plot requires, for example, Buster to discover that the girl he loved back East is a native of his own River Junction. Since Keaton seldom resists the chance to exploit the peculiarly filmic capacity for turning the most ordinary locale into the site of discovery, he places the crucial encounter in a barber's shop, where the identical white cloths that cover all customers set off faces with particular clarity, and where fixed equidistant chairs allow for all manner of spatial redefinition by means of camera placement. Buster occupies his chair at the left of the frame, the girl hers at the right; each sits with head lowered, each faces right. On and on they sit, oblivious of each other, as two barbers administer to them. Then one barber reverses the position of the girl's chair: at last they are face to face. But their eyes remain lowered; what's more, the new position even increases the distance between their faces. Yet we know that, late or soon, one or the other of them must lift an eye. The absurdity of their

\*Despite the official credits, I share along with all other critics and with Keaton himself the position that the style of *Steamboat Bill* is the style of Buster Keaton, not of Charles Reisner.

I wish to thank Charles Affron for his help in the preparation of this section of the ms.

common unconsciousness assumes dramatic tension. Distinctions between gag and plot and visual composition are effaced.

Later, Buster arrives on a visit to his imprisoned father, Ernest Torrence, behind bars, writhing at the very sight of his own son, dominates the left foreground. In the middle ground, seen through the bars, stands the jailer, separating father and son in the depth of space precisely as in his professional function. In the background, framed in the doorway to the right, the light from outdoors setting him off with agonising clarity, stands a creature no father could acknowledge as his own: Buster in an ill-fitting work suit that dwarfs him utterly, an upturned umbrella looming above his head. Here once again the picture is the drama: with its three distinct planes so forcefully defined by the foreground bars and background wall, the shot exploits the depth of cinematic space as cannily as any in the Toland-Welles-Wyler canon.

Keaton takes pleasure in other kinds of pictures as well, as when the wind blows the bedridden Buster through town. Placed dead centre in the long-shot frame, sitting bolt upright in the bed that only a moment before seemed safely moored in a hospital, he finds himself the object of scrutiny on the part of an odd new audience: on either side of him bemused horses gaze from their stalls at the prodigy that has just manifested itself in their stable. Unlike the images in the barber's shop and jail, this lunatic version of a traditional Nativity performs no specific errand for Keaton's plot. It is merely ideal of its kind.

## ACTOR

Commenting in his book *Buster Keaton* on the number of dissimilar roles Keaton played over the good years of his career, David Robinson shrewdly concludes, 'There are many Keatons; and yet eventually only one Buster.' He goes on: 'When these tried young men are eventually placed in exceptional circumstances and faced with exceptional problems—a rebel army, a drifting liner, a family feud, a girl to be won—they change and grow. And extended thus by adversity, rising to cope with practical difficulties, employing their resources of wit and ingenuity and intelligence and physical ability in order to equal fate and overtake it, they all blend into one, and become Buster.' But within this necessary generalisation, some discriminations deserve to be enunciated.

In some Keaton movies the characterisation of the 'tried young man' of the opening and the characterisation of the triumphant hero of the end are essentially alike. In *Go West*, for instance, Keaton plays Friendless, a creature so defined by his melancholic humour that his victories have little effect on his natural style; while in *The General*, the Johnnie Gray we see in the beginning, first at his engineer's post and then flying off to enlist in the Confederate Army, is at least potentially the Johnnie Gray we later see darting across the top of moving trains. But in other Keaton movies the Buster we see in his later heroic phase is a man transformed utterly by desperate love and impossible challenge. By one means or another Keaton always





Aboard ship: Buster Keaton, Ernest Torrence

forces us to still the voices of disbelief and assent to the plausibility of the transformation. In *Battling Butler* we sense it as psychologically just that the bizarre little millionaire, so long derided and battered for the sake of his lady, should finally erupt into a killer in the ring. In *The Navigator* another bizarre millionaire, at first barely able to take his own bath, becomes the sovereign master of an ocean liner; an endless series of gags details his progress, and here the gags themselves are of such transcendent quality that they suspend all question of verisimilitude. In *College*, the proofs of athletic incompetence so clearly depend on Keaton's actual bodily control—

some of these manoeuvres even call for his athlete's limbs to be plainly exposed—that we can't feel surprise at the grace of his final heroic action: we've *known* he had it in his muscles to bring off that impossible run.

*Steamboat Bill* is very much of the second category of Keaton film—indeed, it could be said to define still a third, in which the protagonist undergoes so many physical alterations of such extreme degree that, to adapt Robinson's formula, the name 'Buster' alone could suffice to assert the identity of all the Keatons we see. A freakish runt in beret and moustache first takes claim to the name. Then, under instruction from his father to dress for work aboard a steamboat,

At the barber's shop: Buster Keaton, Joe Keaton, Marion Byron



a dashing young man in a natty and wholly inappropriate naval officer's uniform presents himself for our inspection. Then, as if descended from another planet—no critic of Keaton can resist *that* metaphor—there appears a strange being in wildly outsize work clothes who seems almost an appendage to the inside-out umbrella that dangles over his head. In the end, as if born out of the torrent that is sweeping a town away, comes someone who can catch steamboats and floating jailhouses in his 'strong toil of grace', and who, through all his labours, is obviously the most beautiful man ever photographed. Like the Shakespeare of *The Winter's Tale*, Keaton at this point trusted the conventions of his genre to overcome apparent implausibility. He also knew to trust his own powers as a performer, knew that we would accept all the Keatons we see as the same person because only one person in movie history could have been any of them.

In other ways as well, *Steamboat Bill* records Keaton's fascination with his own screen identity. From his earliest years as an independent maker of comedies, Keaton explored the interaction of actor, scene, costume and, of course, photography in the identification of a screen presence. In *The Playhouse* (1921), to take only the most striking instance, he films a dream world in which all those in sight—all the players in a theatre orchestra, as well as all the spectators—can be, hence are, Buster, sometimes distinguishable by the instrument each plays, sometimes by the clothes each wears, yet each, like the movie itself, a projection of one man. And he complicates this experiment in identity by linking the central Buster to two utterly indistinguishable sisters, one of whom for some reason adores him and one of whom for some reason wants only to hit him when he courts her. In the last sequence, having learned the valuelessness of faces as cards of identity, Buster marks the back of the loving sister with a cross before conducting her up the staircase that will take them to a justice of the peace. The other sister stands by on street level. Halfway up the stairs Buster checks his girl's back for the only proof of her authenticity. Could the deadly substitution have been effected *that* quickly? Of course, in *The Playhouse*—in the movies.

By the year of *Steamboat Bill* Keaton opts for subtler demonstrations, of which the most famous is the episode with the hats early in the film. Since his father has ordered the banishment of the hateful Eastern beret, Buster tries on a series of hats in a shop. First we watch the operation in a long shot that takes in not only Buster but his father and the salesman; later, as the business of the handing over of hats assumes a quick rhythm of its own, we require only a medium shot of Buster staring into a mirror (that is, towards the camera), his father to the left in the frame and the busy arms of the salesman offering specimen after specimen from the right. Each of the hats works its momentary effect. The various forms which, crowning that remarkable countenance, continuously re-define its structural possibilities, become the agency of Buster's search for the new identity he must assume now that his father has outlawed the old. Only once does Buster, with a nervous glance at his



father, hastily reject a proffered hat: it is, as in context it would have to be, the familiar flat Keaton pork-pie.

The episode possesses still further implications. At least some of the hats—given Keaton's sense of consistency I suspect it's all of them, but my own ignorance keeps me from saying so with assurance—are trademarks of other male stars of the 1920s, other presences that *might* have manifested themselves when Buster's father went down to the railroad station to find a son. And these aren't the only stars to whom Keaton alludes in *Steamboat Bill*. In the scene that most horrifies the father, Buster, attempting to soothe a baby whose sleep he has accidentally disturbed, grabs his collegiate ukulele and sings and leaps about in a frenzy of antic but effeminate mollification. It's the kind of act that Keaton seldom liked to put on. It's the kind of act that Chaplin loved. It never recurs after Buster, again at his father's insistence, has lost his little moustache.

These scenes take place in a movie that begins with a father going to a station to meet a son whom he can recognise only by a buttonhole carnation, there to find himself greeted by a train that disgorges a platoon of carnationed males; a movie that ends with the rescue from death by water of a man whose only visible claim to identity is his reversed collar. These scenes also take place in a movie whose most unforgettable moment for many is the pantomime-within-a-pantomime—only Chaplin's Oceana Roll can touch it—that Buster enacts as he tries to communicate to his jailed father the rather complex message that the bread he's carrying contains every imaginable tool necessary to an escape. Costume as essence, performance as an act of confidence: the themes of an actor reviewing his career.

## MAGIC

The everybody-looks-like-Buster shots in *The Playhouse* announce that problems of identity are instinct with problems of illusion; the latter haunt Keaton's work as unrelentingly as the former. In *Sherlock, Jr.*, with its trick effects and that celebrated film-within-a-film episode in which the relation of actor and scene in cinema is proven to be ontologically unsound, questions about the limits and lures of illusion assume an urgency bordering on obsession. In *The Cameraman* the connections between cameras, film, filming and filmers are examined with such subtle knowledge that the movie could serve as text in any course of study on the nature of photography and cinema; it's as though Keaton were at last beginning to make public the special wisdoms implicit in that ideal philosopher's face he has always worn.

There are neither projectors nor cameras to be seen in *Steamboat Bill*. Instead, at the height of the storm Buster seeks refuge in what remains of a vaudeville theatre, a building laid bare, no longer the formal arena of illusion but not yet a gutted building like any other. He mistakes a backcloth for an actual ocean and tries to dive in. He comes upon an illusionist's table, enters, draws the circular curtain, vanishes. He confronts a ventriloquist's dummy who first nods at him, then lets his head fall obscenely on Buster's shoulder.

The whole sequence at first seems oddly out of place in the hurricane. Soon you realise that it is, for Keaton, the natural complement to the storm. Just as the beauty of the outdoors obscures unimaginable perils, so too does the beauty of illusion. A backcloth can do as much damage to your head as an object carried in a gale. A magician's contraption can wipe you off the screen as handily as a cyclone. In illusion (call it magic, or art, or dreams, or movies) there is no more safety than in nature. Survival remains the only name of the only game.

But more unsettling than scenery and magician's gear, finally one of the most unsettling images in all Keaton's work, is the dummy. From *Dead of Night* to *Knock on Wood*, many movies have had something to say about the spookiness of dummies. But the effect of placing Buster face to face with such a creature is uniquely frightful. Its body limp as if every bone and muscle had been eaten away by some disease, the dummy nonetheless perseveres in its hideous, uncontrollable, meaningless grin. It is the precise physical antithesis of Buster himself. It is the monstrous dependent thing Buster would become if his muscles went dead and he had to deny all the impulses of his nature and sink into smiling. In this illusion of a human figure Keaton images the failure to fight back, the ultimate acquiescence. Buster's horror of it is no joke.

All the business with the dummy takes only a few seconds. Here, as so often in the late pieces of master artists, the smallest unexpected detail evokes the preoccupations and triumphs of an entire career. And that is precisely what *Steamboat Bill* and *The Cameraman* look like: late pieces, final versions, the last word. The pleasure they give is immeasurable but the sense is of an ending. Even if MGM and microphones and alcohol hadn't conspired to ruin his subsequent work, where could the thirty-three-year-old past master have gone from here?



## A Semi-Centenary

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post first. By marvels of extempore repetition or compression Ernest made both arrive within a few bars of each other, and the house was ecstatic.

The Film Society rose and the Film Society declined. The war enabled it to slip out of existence peacefully. And after the war, rightly, no one wanted to revive it. Though not from any lack of appreciation by its members it had been ailing for some time. It began with four seasons at the New Gallery, progressed to six seasons at the Tivoli, regressed to a last four back at the New Gallery. There were fewer unshown worthwhile films to hunt. Already the last two seasons before the end had cut down the regular eight performances to six. What need of the Film Society when so many of its aims had been attained, so many reinforcements had arrived to take over?

The banner has passed to the BFI, the NFA, the BFFS, Film Festivals that milk not mainly USA and Europe but the wider world, the NFT and the commercial theatres for specialised audiences. The causes are old nowadays, the censorship elastic, cinema become a normal tool of teaching and research, whole libraries of film books jostle on the shelves, genres ignored and classics neglected are offered to millions on TV; even the commercial world of distribution and exhibition has diversified its range. No longer do tycoons reach for their revolvers when any other lips than those of their own P.R.O.s pronounce the name of 'Art'. (Nor even enquire 'Art who?')

Do we merit commiseration, we few survivors, because time has passed us by? I think not. We had begun starry-eyed and had enjoyed ourselves. Then we had become older and had other things to do. We are only too grateful to the successors whose initiative and devotion has carried everything so much further on. We bless them, we commend them, and are too lazy to do very much to help. Nor should we be vain, or deserve any thanks, if in fact the Society did turn out important. This was not us, but the *Zeitgeist*. It only *happened* to be us. Without the Film Society the same results would have been attained here, of course, as they have been everywhere, in some other way.

As I re-read the guff in our heroic declarations, I sometimes reflect on man's infinite capacity for rationalising into good motives what he wants to do anyway. It brings to my mind a paper I heard read by a gigantic zoologist at a Congress of Game Biology in Moscow a few years back. It was a wonderful paper on Polar Bears. The big Russian had nurtured them, weighed them, analysed their faeces and excretions, illustrated all with gorgeous colour pictures of the Arctic and animals of every age and size. 'Why are you doing this work?' asked an American scientist. He must have had in mind that Polar Bears can neither be bred as food nor hunted for sport, since they are objects of strict protective legislation; thus they were odd subjects for a Congress on Game. The giant hesitated and scratched his head. 'I suppose I like bears,' he said.

That was it. We liked films.





# LOST AND FOUND

*Sjöström and Eastman House at the NFT*

Tom Milne



'Man, Woman and Sin': Gladys Brockwell and Jeanne Eagels; John Gilbert behind bars.

In Raoul Walsh's *Sadie Thompson*, so long feared to be one of the legion of lost films, Gloria Swanson's gum-chewing, wise-cracking Sadie sweeps off the boat and on to her tropical island with all favours flying, carousing with the marines and scandalising the missionaries, in a cross between *Mr. Roberts*, *South Pacific* and rollicking Walsh entertainment which is a heady reminder of just how glorious a comedienne Swanson was. Suddenly, the film begins to sharpen to a point in an ominous montage of native drums and palm leaves pulsing in the stormy night which awes her into snatching at the missionary's twin-pack offer of redemption (maybe) and expiation (in the

electric chair). Learning the glad tidings, the missionary (Lionel Barrymore) hastens to share his hallelujahs. And as Sadie turns her face up to him, just as the spark of lust ignites in his eye, the screen abruptly goes blank with the last reel seemingly irretrievably lost: one of those moments (excited discovery bedevilled by bad, lost or unavailable prints) which make up the splendours and miseries of becoming involved in film history.

Introducing the recent NFT season devoted to 'The Treasures of Eastman House', James Card made an eloquent plea for open-mindedness. Griffith, he caustically observed, is generally accepted as the great

maestro who invented practically everything largely because he took out a paid advertisement to say so, and because few people bother to look at other contemporary directors to reassess their claims. Even more heretically, he suggested that von Stroheim might not be quite the Gulliver among Lilliputians he is commonly revered as. And certainly films like Sjöström's *The Wind* or William K. Howard's *White Gold* can rub shoulders comfortably with *Greed*; equally certainly, Stroheim's tender vision of the stars that can shine over city streets in *Walking Down Broadway* has no particular edge over, say, Paul Fejos' *Lonesome* or Monta Bell's unjustly neglected *Man, Woman and Sin*. It is a plea, to judge by the controversy recently raging in *BFI News*, that 'our teachers, our educators'—to use Mr. Card's peculiarly apt phrase—would do well to heed if it would persuade them to cast off their genre blinkers, stop rehashing what has already been said about a narrow pantheon of established favourites, and see some movies which might open horizons.

The Sjöström season running concurrently with the Eastman House programme, for instance, revealed among other things that Sjöström's oeuvre, relegated so long to critical disfavour, is split by a sort of schizophrenia. The familiar Sjöström of films like *Terje Vigen*, *The Outlaw* and his *Wife*, *Karin Ingmarsdotter* and *The Phantom Carriage*, undeniably powerful though perhaps unduly ponderous family chronicles or sagas of man's struggle against the elements and his own baser self—clearly personal, though adapted as often as not from novels by Selma Lagerlöf—still shows him to be the source-book for Swedish gloom and angst. On the other hand, his collaboration with Hjalmar Bergman in lesser known films like *His Lordship's Last Will* and *Mästerman* reveals a Sjöström not only revelling in Bergman's psychological subtlety and comic edge, but willing to indulge in formal experiment.

The point—that Sjöström may be a complete *auteur* who makes better films while remaining a *metteur en scène* (though *The Wind* arguably bridges the gap)—is confirmed by *He Who Gets Slapped*, a visually stunning adaptation of Andrejev's play about a scientist who laughs in hysterical disbelief when he realises that his benefactor has stolen not only his researches but his wife, and who is frozen by that moment of shock into the fixation that only as a circus clown, an object of mockery and abuse, can he go on living. The moment, brilliantly acted by Lon Chaney, is also brilliantly realised by Sjöström: as the scientist sinks down in despair at his cluttered desk, he accidentally knocks over a globe of the world that rolls away to become a ball spinning on the finger-tip of a grinning, white-faced clown, which in turn becomes a huge globe with a horde of tiny clowns clambering down invisible ropes to perch on its horizontal band which, in a final metamorphosis, becomes a circus ring with a troupe of clowns watching a rehearsal.

In its acute masochism, expressionism blending neatly into the horror film ethos (the clown dies in the ring, to ecstatic applause from the audience, after exacting ghastly revenge on his tormentors by setting a lion on them), *He Who Gets*



*Slapped* is *sui generis* in Sjöström's work. A blood brother here to the Tod Browning of *The Unknown*, Sjöström visualises the clown's searing pain as a symphony of stark black and white contrasts radiating from the astonishing moment when, as he broods alone in the ring, the spotlight is switched out on him, leaving his chalk-white face as a tiny balloon suspended in a sea of darkness where it gradually vanishes, leaving emptiness. And he also turns the film into an echo of the clown's silent accusation with a superb final shot, when the troupe of clowns mourning for their comrade again become the tiny clowns perched on the spinning globe, this time facing the audience in unspoken reproach as they toss a miniature corpse out of the screen right into our laps. The chapter on Sjöström is far from closed, and it won't be until his six remaining American films are available for reassessment along with *He Who Gets Slapped*, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wind*.

The Eastman House season helped to confirm a few reputations and deny a few. Despite assorted assertions (including Mr. Card's) to the contrary, I can't see that there is much to choose between early and late Cecil B. DeMille except size: in his early dramas and comedies of manners, the later Biblical bromides are replaced by the sort of ponderous epigrams culled by *Reader's Digest* as samples of wit and wisdom in the war between men and women, while his cinematic style seems largely a matter of manoeuvring his cast from one static tableau to the next in much the same way as he marshalled his later cohorts. The hideous kitsch, too, of *The Blue Bird* seems to suggest that the still somewhat shadowy Maurice Tourneur was a pleasant painter on celluloid (as witness his lovely *Last of the Mohicans*) very much at the mercy of his subjects. *Peter Pan*, on the other hand, if only for the astonishing delicacy of the early scenes in the Darling household and the magical moment when Peter first appears at the window (though the whole film is a delight on an only slightly lower level), puts it beyond doubt that Herbert Brenon is overdue for rediscovery.

Watching a collection of films like this, one is led to reflect again that the real cause for regret was not so much the coming of sound which actually killed the silent cinema, but the fact that the primitive sound systems involved a break with the tradition of location filming which, in Hollywood at least, has never really been repaired. King Vidor's *Happiness*, for instance, is a charming comedy about a downtrodden New York shopgirl (Laurette Taylor), who stoutly rejects offers of help from a bored socialite who befriends her (Hedda Hopper) and makes her own road to romance and prosperity in a way not only strangely reminiscent of *Walking Down Broadway* but one giving a real and poignant meaning to the title. Fascinating anyway for Laurette Taylor's scintillating performance, and full of characteristic Vidor touches marking the film's ideological relationship to his later films like *The Crowd* and *Our Daily Bread*, *Happiness* is given that extra something by its location scenes: a joyous tram ride through the city (looking something like a trial run for *Sunrise*) and a sequence in

the subway where Laurette Taylor and boy friend have to resort to physical restraint to prevent her engagingly loony mother from claiming unsuspecting travellers as her long-lost husband.

Much the same is true, only more so, of John Collins' curious *Blue Jeans* (1918), based on a stage melodrama which obviously had ambitions to outdo Brioux' notorious *Damaged Goods* with a story about young love bedevilled by civic corruption and a breathless welter of revelations suggesting that the proud newly-weds might be brother and sister. Direction and performances are extremely sensitive, but it is the tangibly vivid rustic locations (sunshine and cool water, dust and lush grass) which lift the film touchingly into the realm of truth.

Clearly a talented film-maker, John Collins died just after completing *Blue Jeans*, so there is no *oeuvre* to explore. If one is to believe a reputation belied by the astonishing *Man, Woman and Sin* (1927), the same holds true of Monta Bell, who worked with Chaplin on *A Woman of Paris*, directed Garbo in her first American film (*The Torrent*) and, among others, made a whole string of silents with Norma Shearer. *Man, Woman and Sin*, at any rate, is little short of a masterpiece, based on a conventional plot by Bell himself—young man from wrong side of tracks falls for society girl, is disillusioned to discover she is a kept woman, is jailed when he kills her lover in self-defence and she perjures herself to protect her reputation, but is saved at the eleventh hour by her love—which he proceeds, fascinatingly, to turn inside out.

The film opens with a delicately understated social comment. A ragged urchin wanders by the railway tracks picking up stray lumps of coal, waves cheerily as a train passes, and falls stunned as the driver suddenly shies a piece of coal at him. Picking himself up, he wanders home to a back-alley hovel, past a group of negro children playing in the dirty yard (the blacks are just there, neighbours, un-commented), gives his proud mother the few cents he has earned, and trudges off to hawk the table napkins she spends her day sewing. At a stately mansion round the corner a children's party is in progress, and for a brief moment in the doorway he stares open-mouthed at wonderland, caught in mutual fascination with the little child in the party dress who comes to the door.

Then, while doing his paper delivery and lamplighting rounds in a marvellous set piece on the twilight street, he passes a small huddle of boys gazing fearfully at the local

Pat O'Malley and Laurette Taylor in King Vidor's *Happiness*



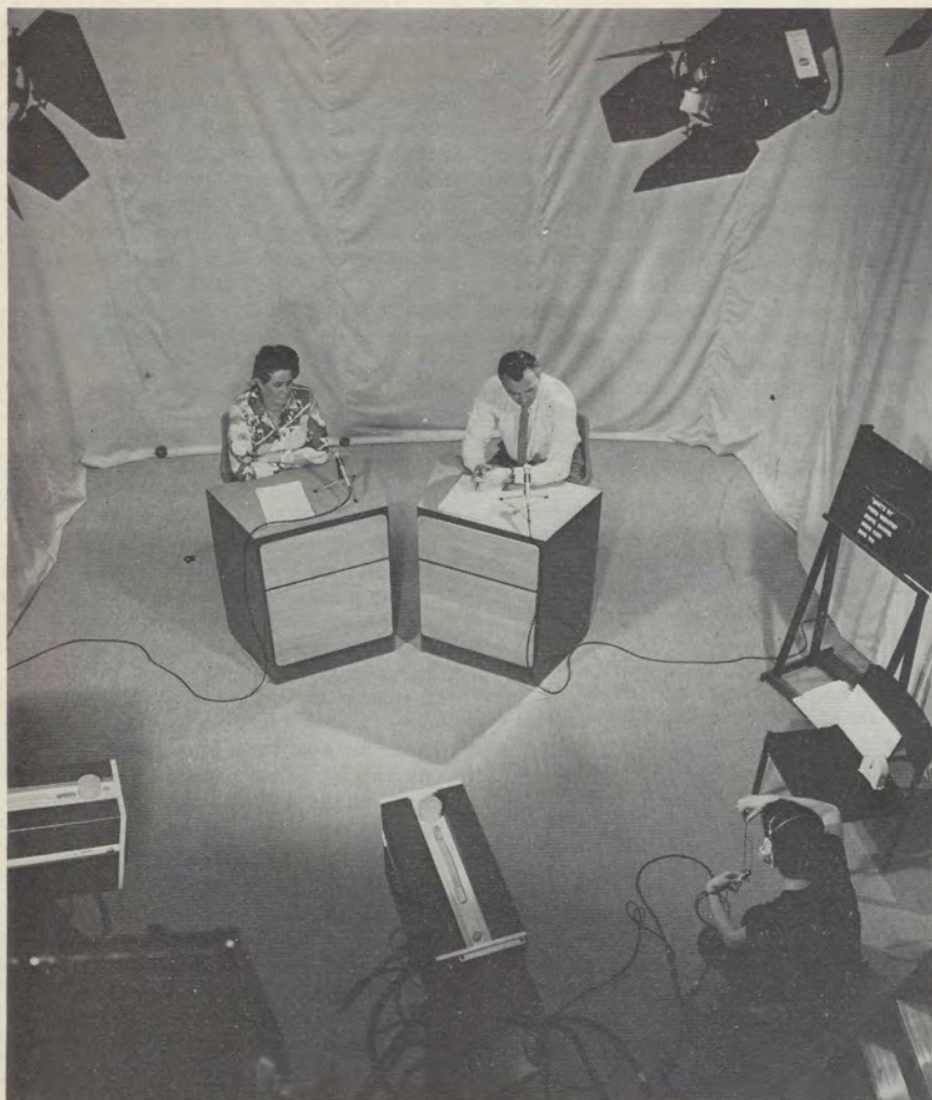
'haunted' house. Across the street, the same little girl in the same white dress leans casually against her front gate sucking a lollipop. And the boy marches boldly into the haunted house, crouches for a moment amid the cobwebs and flickering shadows, then rushes headlong out again, slowing to a jaunty walk past the silent group of boys, past the little girl who drops her lollipop. Gravely he picks it up, licks it to remove the worst of the dust, and hands it back. Equally gravely, she accepts the tribute, and her scandalised mother, appearing on the doorstep, hurries her off inside after taking away the lollipop and hurling it into the gutter.

Quite apart from the obvious reference, the whole sequence has something of the tone and timbre of *Meet Me in St. Louis*, the nostalgia as well as the magical adventure of growing up. All too soon (and this is a rare tribute in films with children) the boy grows up to be John Gilbert, just starting out as a cub reporter, now earning enough to fulfil his still doting mother's dream of moving to a better neighbourhood, and given his first real chance when the blasé but bewitching society editor (Jeanne Eagels) needs a partner for a ball she is to cover.

Although Gilbert seems miscast and uncomfortable as the naïvely virginal young hero, the whole sequence is miraculously funny as he goes into innocent ecstasies about the opulent wonders of the distinctly routine ball, gradually sparking an amused but answering echo in his bored companion, and afterwards wandering dazedly through the busy newspaper offices, reluctant to return his hired dress suit and desperately hoping that somebody will notice his glory. And Jeanne Eagels (everything she was cracked up to be and more) is the still centre of the film: a little ravaged, a little cynical, her immobility suggesting that *she* was the little girl in the party dress, her enigmatic smile hinting at regret for an innocence perhaps not entirely lost.

After the death of the lover, staged with the three participants dwarfed by the lavish apartment which first gives Gilbert an inkling of the truth, the whole point of the film (and incidentally of Gilbert's remarkable performance) suddenly emerges. In a sequence curiously reminiscent of *The Night of the Hunter* in its overtones of childhood nightmare, the distraught Gilbert runs away to take refuge in the haunted house; once again huddled in the corner with his dark terrors, he is discovered by his mother, and as she moves to console him, she is seen only in silhouette on the wall, a monstrous, shadowy hand reaching out to clutch him. In a startling upheaval of the mom-and-apple-pie ethos, one suddenly realises that Mrs. Frankenstein has truly succeeded in creating a pet monster: a son riddled with repressions and incapable of any normal, healthy reaction as he pursues his rainbow of snobbish, inhibited desire. The diagnosis is inescapably confirmed in a devastating final sequence after the mother has persuaded Jeanne Eagels to go to the police with the truth. A taxi disappears into the night with a last, haunted glimpse of Jeanne Eagels' face framed in the rear window as she looks back in regret; meanwhile the mother walks happily off in the opposite direction, her boy once more safely under her wing.





*'The opportunity to have their own say in their own way...' At the now defunct Bristol Cablevision studio, Mavis Banks, a telephonist, and her husband Colin, a dog-handler in the Bristol Constabulary, presented the station's breakfast-time programme. The low cost, black and white studio equipment is by Link Electronics of Hampshire.*

Last month, Lord Annan and some members of the group of men and women known officially as the Committee of Inquiry into the Future of Broadcasting spent a weekend at King's College, Cambridge, as guests of the Royal Television Society at its biennial Convention. It was a sort of climax (if you can have any sort of climax at King's, Cambridge) to the first phase of the Annan inquiry, the three-year investigation into the structure of broadcasting in Britain which is currently having as much effect on the growth of the industry as the economic recession. The broadcasters themselves, in the form of the Royal Television Society (founded in 1927 and containing management, production and engineering representatives, making a fairly broad cross-section of the people professionally involved in television broadcasting), were having the last word, as it were, before Lord Annan turns to sifting through the mountain of written evidence which has been coming in over the past year and starts on the second stage of the inquiry. (The third stage, drafting, should be the most interesting of all, though, alas, we shall not be privy to the tantrums and arguments in the corridors of power while that goes on.)

While broadcasting itself, unsure of the directions in which it ought to be going, hard-pressed by inflation and recession, and in some cases (such as the development of independent local radio) statutorily limited pending the outcome of Annan, is marking time in terms of growth and development, the pundits and pedants are having a field-day, dissecting and analysing the medium, discussing alternative options and generally doing everything except advising Annan exactly what ought to be

done. After a recent conversation between Annan and a group of broadcasting journalists, one member of the committee came up to me and said, 'That was all most interesting, but we are very disappointed in you.' I thought we had been particularly helpful, not to mention articulate, so I asked him why: 'Well, you see, what we wanted you to do was to tell us, in one paragraph in words of one or two syllables, exactly what we should be recommending.'

The Great Debate about broadcasting,

# WAITING FOR ANNAN

Rod  
Allen

which has so far been conducted in a series of hushed whispers, has been extremely successful in coming up with a list of questions about the medium. But—as yet—there have been no answers. Most of the evidence so far submitted to the Committee has been in the form either of apologies from the existing broadcasting organisations describing in fine detail the way they operate and pleading for perpetuation; or of absurd documents from the (substantial) lunatic fringe suggesting the virtual destruction of the present institutions and their replacement with anything from worker-controlled broadcasting collectives to community-organised cable television stations, all of them without a thought as to how a costly exercise like TV broadcasting ought to be financed (although commercial income or a licence fee are generally dismissed in the first paragraph); or of patient lists of questions that the Committee ought to be looking at before starting to formulate any answers. Realistic alternatives or even sensible modifications of the existing structures are few and far between in the mound of paper behind which Lord Annan and his colleagues are at present disappearing.

In short, neither broadcasting nor its critics knows what ought to be done. Although the RTS Convention and some other groups have attempted to sound out the most obvious source of the answers—the viewing public—and although the Annan Committee has indicated its intention to carry out some sort of formal market research into the public's needs and wants, most of these worthy attempts to try to remember who television is for have fallen down on the solid, if academic, problem that an inquiry into what the public wants is inevitably rendered less than valid by the fact that the public responds mainly on the basis of what it has already had. 'Television' remains the unquestioned little altar in the corner; and since there is no public concept of talking back to your television set, the public does not feel it can ask the box for anything substantially different from that which it already gets from it. This, of course, is because the broadcasters have for years studiously refrained from suggesting that



television is a proper subject for discussion by its consumers, except in programmes put on very late at night and only watched by radical chic liberals, such as *Late Night Line Up* and its successors. The only recent popular attempt to discuss the nature of television on television, Peter Batty's *World of Television*, made for Yorkshire TV, was ironically blacked by the technicians' union, ACTT, and not transmitted.

One of those wonderful American textbooks for undergraduates majoring in broadcasting arrived in the office for review the other day. It was called, simply, *Television Economics*, and towards the beginning of Chapter One there was a bit which, in paraphrase, stated firmly that it is often wrongly thought that a television station is in business to produce programmes. Nonsense, said the authors sternly. Any fool knows that the real product of a television station is audiences, and the nature of its business is to sell those audiences to advertisers, at prices expressed in dollars per thousand head of people per minute of commercial time. Understand that, they implied, and you should get on well in this industry. It would be extremely simple to approach the problem of broadcasting structures if we could wholly accept this thesis. But even in the United States, where on the whole market economics dominate the industry, there is a continual (and growing) feeling in the commercial networks and stations, as well as in the brave and under-financed public television system, that at least some programmes ought to be, well, edifying. If they can be both edifying and commercially successful, so much the better, which is why ATV's *Edward VII* (or *Those Royal Victorians*, as CBS has endearingly retitled it for the benefit of American viewers) was snapped up with such eagerness (and for such a large sum of money) by American commercial television. Simplistic views of market economics in TV, however, have been somewhat stymied by the empirical discovery in the US that both viewers and advertisers respond best not to simple tube-fodder but to hard news programming, which is currently delivering the best demographic profile of any programme category on American network television and which is therefore in greatest demand among advertisers.

Which is, in a way, symptomatic of the central problem facing those who have either been appointed or have appointed themselves to try to work out television's destiny. Nothing is simple. People are never what you expect them to be. The medium is clearly powerful in terms of its ability to change people's attitudes and behaviour—otherwise British advertisers would not pour £120 million or more a year into its ever-open maw—but nobody (least of all the advertisers) knows exactly how that power is exercised, what it is about the glowing tube that makes people change the habits of a lifetime. Perhaps that is just as well.

One of the major situations that we have to face is the conflict between those who want to use television to change people, and those who want to limit its power to do so. Both groups of people, by almost any set of political or moral standards, are right and proper in their objectives. As Ed Murrow once sagely observed (before he started with

the US Information Service, no doubt): 'This instrument can teach, it can illuminate; yes, and it can even inspire. But it can do so only to the extent that humans are determined to use it to those ends. Otherwise it is merely lights and wires in a box.' It should be used to make the world a better place to live in, to improve the quality of life, to make people aware of themselves and those around them, to show options and alternatives, to present valuable social aspirations and to offer precepts of proper social behaviour, as well as to offer cultural experience and catharsis. Without that objective in mind, the machine is nothing better than lights and wires in a box, and we might as well stop now and cancel the whole thing.

On the other hand, television broadcasting frequencies are limited, the number of people who can have any sort of consistent access to the airwaves (and hence to the eyes and ears of the populace at large) is strictly finite, and the dangers of letting the medium get into the hands of a small group of tightly-knit politically motivated people, or of any individual group dedicated to a single point of view, are substantial and obvious. So we have developed elaborate systems of checks and balances to ensure that for most of the time television deliberately castrates itself, by neutralising every overt point of view proffered on the box with an equal and opposite one. Only very occasionally, such as in the Thames *This Week* programme on the Ethiopian famine, in which it was not felt necessary to balance the humanitarian view presented by Jonathan Dimbleby with a spokesman for the Ethiopian government, do we find television being allowed to persuade people to get up from their armchairs and do something—in the Ethiopian case, persuading many people to do something quite difficult, in the form

of parting voluntarily with money.

It has been said that in a society where there are many diverse sources of media input, it is permissible to let broadcasters present 'committed' programming, and to remove the requirements of balance. Newspapers are frequently pointed to as an example; we do not require them to present balancing views opposite their editorial pages (though they quite frequently do so), and by a process of reasoning which escapes me it is said that the diversity of political opinion represented by the Press is protective of freedom and liberty. The theory is that anyone can start a newspaper (try telling that to anyone who's actually tried to do so), since the number of printing presses available is virtually unlimited; the converse of this is that the number of broadcasting frequencies available is strictly limited, and so diversity is impossible. For myself, I believe the argument is rather a red herring, most often aired in the Press which has its own vested interests to protect (particularly against broadcasting); and while it is clear that a limited number of outlets for broadcasting requires that a degree of balance and diversity of input must be maintained, it can be argued that while there is a case for increasing the amount of balance—by statute, if necessary—in the Press, there could be some liberalising of the requirements of balance in broadcasting.

On the other hand, if we are, as we seem to be, using the limited nature of the broadcast frequency spectrum as an argument for limiting broadcasting's political freedom of action, perhaps we ought to look once more at the technical parameters within which we are working.

Lord Annan and his committee are working on the technical basis of something

*'Both edifying and commercially successful...? ATV's 'Edward VII' sold handsomely overseas because it managed to combine a sort of worthiness with the traditional elements of TV drama'*





called the Cockburn Report, or more properly the Technical Papers of the Television Advisory Committee, published in 1972. The job of the Television Advisory Committee, a permanent body which used to report to the Postmaster General (and now reports to the Home Secretary, or such part of him that cares about broadcasting), is to establish technical parameters for the broadcasting services, and in particular the radio frequency licensing aspect of the Home Office Broadcasting Department's functions. It is formed more or less of professionals, and the idea is that it lays out the technical possibilities without making a great deal of comment upon them, although the Cockburn Report pointed out some financial facts about some of the technical possibilities it came up with three years ago.

The situation that the broadcasting industry and Lord Annan are facing is that there is one further national network of television virtually ready now—the famous fourth channel, or TV4 as it was called by the 1972 campaigners who tried to keep it out of the purview of the existing ITV companies, or P4 as it is known in the trade. This could be on the air within two years or less of a go-ahead; there is space in the transmitter halls for additional equipment, there is room on the aerial towers for additional antennae, and the frequencies are already assigned on a national plan. Programme links to carry signals from the studios to the transmitters have yet to be constructed (these are the responsibility of the Post Office, which is determined to hang on to that responsibility even though most broadcasters agree that it would be cheaper and more efficient if links were operated and owned by the broadcasters themselves). And, of course, the little matter of who is to provide the programmes has yet to be settled.

Beyond that, and the agreed time-scale is somewhere in the mid-80s, we can deal with two further national networks, known variously as either P5 and P6 or P5 and P5½, mainly because under the frequency allocation plan it will not be possible to cover the whole of the country with the sixth network. These will be available when the original 405-line transmissions of BBC-1 and ITV cease—at present, of course, BBC-1 and ITV are duplicated on both 405-lines and 625-lines, thus occupying valuable frequencies as well as necessitating the operation of additional transmitting equipment. The TAC recommended going for closure of 405 as early as possible, perhaps by 1980, but even so the re-engineering of the frequencies—installation of new transmitters and links and so forth—will take us up to around 1984, a date with which to conjure.

Then by 1990 the technology, if not the finance, will be available for us to fly television-to-home direct broadcasting satellites covering the whole country; and frequencies in the satellite band, known as SHF, have been allocated to the UK already, enabling us to operate a maximum of four further national networks via satellite. (Space and electronic technology go so fast that it's likely that both the time-scale and the cost of satellite broadcasting will come down quicker than expected; it's possible, though unlikely, that the economics of satellites will render them more

attractive than re-engineering 405 for P5 and P6 by the mid-1980s, or in other words just that little bit too late to take advantage of the possibilities.)

In the long term, then, we are dealing with ten national networks of television, as opposed to the three we at present enjoy. However, in all likelihood the Annan committee will only make final decisions about one or, at the most, three of them—P4, P5 and P6. And in the present economic situation, there is a possibility that the basic decision to be made by Annan will be that of deferring a decision about *any* further broadcasting outlets (although the committee's enthusiasm for local radio is already becoming known, and the cost of extending the local radio system, whether independent or BBC, is relatively low).

Of course, there are different ways of crumbling the cookie. The TAC was criticised in 1972 for thinking only in terms of national networks, because we have always had national networks in Britain. There is a scenario in which metropolitan areas could be given more channels while rural areas are given fewer (or at least not given more), and this has been drawn to the committee's attention. Under a disparity-allocation scheme, the permutations become interesting, to say the least; why not, for instance, an extra channel in London and Birmingham devoted to the interests of the Asian community? (Why not? Mainly because it would be difficult to finance; but perhaps there is a solution to that.)

Then, of course, there is the alternative option—the magic panacea in the view of some media radicals, and the thorn in the side in the view of others. This is cable television, described in 1972 by the American Sloan Commission as the Television of Abundance. In theory, the number of channels you can transmit along a cable connected to a house is limitless; in practice, technology is already offering us upward of 36 channels, plus what is known as downstream capability—the ability to send signals back from the house to the central exchange.

It is cable television which has generally excited most of the people who are most vociferous, if not most articulate, about the future of the medium. Not just the loony fringe, but quite large numbers of responsible observers of the medium who have seen it as a way of satisfying the blest trio of sirens first proposed by Stuart Hood: access, accountability and participation. Because it seemed (from US and, to a lesser extent, Canadian experience) that the equipment necessary to originate programmes for cable TV was much cheaper, smaller and easier to operate than the equipment used in 'real' television, it was thought that it would offer people the opportunity to have their own say in their own way, and if their aunts and cousins were the only people who watched it wouldn't matter very much because it was so cheap, minute for minute, anyway.

Experience, unfortunately, has not borne out this seemingly ideal state of affairs. In this country, five resolutely half-hearted local cable television experiments were set up by the Ministry for Posts and Telecommunications in 1972. They were licensed only to provide locally originated community

television programmes, and there was no possibility for the commercial operators of the systems to receive any additional income for this service. Today, only two of the experiments survive, and they will probably close next year, three years before the Annan recommendations become law. Such research as there has been on the experiments shows, not unexpectedly, that most support has been forthcoming for those cable systems which existed in towns where local media were weak: in Swindon, for instance, studiously ignored by London and Western ITV services, on the fringes of both of which it lies, with no local radio, and with a less than excellent local newspaper, the community (or at least the organised bits of it) has responded enthusiastically to the access and participation offered by the hard-working, small and dedicated team of workers operating the system on behalf of financiers EMI. In the London suburb of Greenwich, on the other hand, well served by regional TV, radio and print media, the response was far more limited.

Why have such normally commercially prudent companies as EMI, Rediffusion (Bristol) and British Relay (Sheffield) been voluntarily pouring money into costly services which are statutorily prohibited from bearing revenue, let alone profit? The answer is simple: in the long term, these companies hope that cable TV will also be allowed to carry paid-for services, such as tele-shopping, local advertising (this has recently been permitted on an experimental basis and is being pursued enthusiastically in Sheffield), and of course pay-television. But because of the limited terms of reference of the Ministry-designed experiments, Lord Annan and his committee will not be able to evaluate the implications of these logical extensions of local cable service. A University of Leicester research paper on the Swindon system wryly concluded: 'Whether this was a genuine experiment whose outcome was intended by policy-makers to be relevant to broadcasting policy must be open to question.'

Still, even if we've been having fun in the UK with the five limited experiments without producing much usable information, there remain North American precepts from which Lord Annan might draw some valid conclusions about cable. In the United States, it is now fairly widely accepted that the only real money to be made out of cable is in its mode as pay-television, in which subscribers pay metered amounts for things like first-run movies and ball games which have been purchased for exclusive screening by the cable operators. The National Association of Broadcasters, an American society of TV and radio station owners which is generally six yards to the right of Louis XIV in its political positioning, is busy fighting a rearguard action against the cable operators under the banner 'Save Free TV'. And, for once, they may have a point: pay-TV serves only those who can afford to pay for it, and ignores the most important user of off-air TV, the lower-income viewer. As for the much-vaunted public access channels, which a benevolent Federal Communications Commission obliges cable operators to make available to the community without charge, these have on the whole been taken over by pornographers and



amateur imitators of 'real' TV. (Lord Annan may—or may not—consider the question that the lover of pornography is seriously deprived by the lack of it on television in this country, but he will probably conclude that the place for it is not on a community access service.)

In Canada, where over half the television households in the country are connected to a cable system, the picture seems to be more attractive. Some access channels are used by the community; some educational programming is distributed effectively by cable; ethnic services are provided without extra charge to the foreign-language communities in the major urban areas by cable operators. But if you point at Canadian cable and say that it proves that cable is a viable and valid medium, you omit the most important reason why Canadian consumers pay their \$5 or \$6 a month to the cable companies—which is that by cable they receive clear, colour pictures from the American networks. With efficient and complicated receiving apparatus, the cable companies capture the signals of bordering American commercial TV stations off the air and feed them into the homes of millions of waiting Canadians, who could not otherwise see the enticing offerings of ABC, CBS and NBC. With the profits rolling in from this service, it is no great problem to the cable companies to save their consciences (or even provide a sincerely intended alternative) with additional local low-cost originations.

All of which may seem a long way round to dismiss cable as a viable possibility in this country; and in fact to do so altogether would be to ignore the role that it could play in the future. Eventually, we shall be a wired nation; even if the Post Office did not have its political eyes on the prospect of connecting every home in the land with broadband cable for data collection and distribution, electronic letters, teletext services and the rest (which should prove cheaper than having men trudging round the streets delivering letters) it would come anyway. And the fact that the Post Office wants to do it will only hasten the day, although whether it will ever actually work remains open to question, bearing in mind the Post Office's bravely dismal record in electronic pioneering. If it comes, however, we shall probably find that the wired-nation service will be distributing national or regional television services (and as many of them as we want it to) rather than the local community TV services that we would want it to in an ideal world.

It would on the whole be reasonable to conclude cautiously that up to the year 1990, we shall still only be considering national or quasi-national services of television, run on the whole by monolithic institutions which may be commercial or non-commercial, or both, and that *Coronation Street*, or something like it, will still be running twenty years from now.

It will be true that a substantial minority of people, twenty years from now, will own some kind of video reproduction device in their homes which will let them choose the time that they view television programmes. The assumptions on which you can base this possibility are that the industry will have succeeded in developing a reliable, low-cost



*"Coronation Street", or something like it, will still be running twenty years from now . . .*  
Betty Driver, Jessie Evans, Eileen Derbyshire, Jean Alexander, Kathy Staff

video playback device, capable of reproducing sound and pictures to the same standard as the regular home colour TV, perhaps also (though not necessarily) capable of recording programmes off the air, together with a replication system for software costing as little (or as much, according to how you look at it) per unit as today's long-playing gramophone records—and this is something which the industry has signally failed to do so far, although the Philips-MCA laser replay video disc has distinct possibilities. Time scale forecasts are notoriously likely to make the forecaster look an idiot, but since the video cassette-disc revolution has been forecast to take place every year so far since 1969 it is fairly safe to remark that it probably won't begin to become a reality in the home much before 1985.

The simple answer? It's simpler than it looks. We really aren't talking about a radical change in Britain's broadcasting services before the end of the 1980s. Apart from recommending some kind of extension of the local radio services, the Annan Committee only has one decision of immediate effect to make: and that is to decide whether to allocate the fourth channel or not. As is being frequently said these days, the national economic situation is such that Annan might decide to defer the decision altogether, concluding that we simply cannot afford to devote even the £30 or £40 (or £100, or whatever) million a year that is involved in the establishment of another television service. If that's what the committee decides, then it's all over apart from a bit of tinkering with the BBC and ITV systems. It is, incidentally, fairly well accepted among broadcasters that the existing services will atrophy into inbred, middle-aged mediocrity within ten years without the stimulus of additional competition, and although everyone has his own designs on the fourth channel most broadcasters would accept that some kind of expansion of television services would be welcome, even if only to absorb the new

talent which is clamouring for the positions and access grimly hung on to by the present incumbents.

If Annan decides that it is worth introducing a fourth channel, and if the Government of the day agrees with him, the pragmatic possibilities are fairly limited. Briefly, they are those of an educational channel (the recent fuss over the ILEA closed-circuit educational service would have been largely irrelevant had it had access to an on-air transmitter—and OECA in Toronto is busy proving that a full-time educational TV service can be exciting, useful and even sometimes entertaining); an 'accommodation' channel, devoted on the whole to televising Parliament, Test Matches and congresses and conventions such as the political party conferences and so on; an ITV-2 operated by the IBA and the existing ITV companies, a solution articulately lobbied by the companies and the Authority and not without its merits; a competitive commercial channel, for which the advertising industry reluctantly admits there will probably be enough available money by 1980 or so; or a sort of National Television Foundation producing worthy programmes at a not inconsiderable cost to the public purse.

Oh yes, one other solution. The film industry, in its submission to Annan, thinks that it has enough talent, vitality and ability to run the fourth channel, and that it should be given a go. One can only hope that the Committee has taken a look at the way Wardour Street has systematically decimated the film industry over the past decade, studiously ignored television in the hope that it might go away, and assiduously dismantled the production infrastructure represented by the major studios. Any fourth channel should of course be used to stimulate independent production, on film and on tape, with some kind of guarantee of access for independent producers; but to give it to the existing film industry in this country would look, on present form, like a guarantee of disaster.



# Film REVIEWS

## Nashville

'A dialectic collage of unreality,' remarked pop singer Brenda Lee, emerging from the Nashville premiere in August. After a summer full of humourless rhetoric in the American press about 'the true lesson of Watergate', 'the failure of our civilisation', 'the long nauseating terror of a fall through the existential void', and equally grave matters—most of it implying that a movie has to be about 'everything' (i.e., the State of the Union) before it can be about anything—it was refreshing to discover that someone, at long last, had finally got it right. Even if Lee's comment was intended as a slam, it deserves to be resurrected as a tribute. For if *Nashville* (CIC) is conceivably the most exciting commercial American movie in years, this is first of all because of what it constructs, not what it exposes.

From the moment we begin with an ad for the film itself—a blaring overload of multimedia confusion—and pass to a political campaign van spouting banalities, then to a recording studio where country music star Haven Hamilton (Henry Gibson) is cutting a hilariously glib Bicentennial anthem, *Nashville* registers as a double-fisted satire of its chosen terrain, and it would be wrong to suggest that its targets of derision are beside the point, even if the angle of vision subsequently widens to take in more than just foolishness. But a rich 'dialectic collage' of contradictory attitudes and diverse realities is what brings the film so vibrantly to life, and to launch moralistic rockets on such a shifting base is to miss its achievement entirely. In point of fact, the film celebrates as much as it ridicules—often doing both at the same time—while giving both its brilliant cast and its audience too much elbow room to allow for any overriding thesis.

Robert Altman and his collaborators have built a narrative out of many superimposed parts, and it is worth looking at some of their procedures. Joan Tewkesbury wrote her blueprint-script after spending only five days in the Tennessee capital, apparently guided mainly by Altman's request that its country music milieu be linked comparatively to politics, and that an assassination figure at the end. Actors were given the choice of following her dialogue or substituting their own, and many were invited to compose their own songs (usually with Richard Baskin) under the assumption that country music, like politics, is potentially anyone's game. Similarly, Thomas Hal Phillips was given the job of launching a presidential primary campaign—the film is set in 1976, the year of the U.S. Bicentennial—for an invisible fictional candidate named Hal Phillips Walker, complete with local headquarters and a Replacement Party platform to be heard from a van, prowling the streets ignored like a ghostly proxy. Finally, the sound system inaugurated on *California Split*—a set-up using many on and off-screen microphones whose volume levels can be altered during the sound-mixing stage—enabled Altman to extend his principles of improvisation further, beyond the parameters of the camera's range.

A great deal was shot—two hours of rushes were reportedly screened every day—and at one

stage Altman considered releasing two mammoth films, each of which would cover the same time span while concentrating on twelve different characters. That he settled on a more conventional solution, and concludes the film with a veritable surplus of Significance after over 150 minutes of open sailing, is of course commensurate with the querulous sociological responses. But prior to this capitulation he engenders his most adventurous structure to date, deftly juggling his cast of two dozen characters with the assurance of a master storyteller while simultaneously demanding (and rewarding) an unusual amount of alertness and participation from the spectator.

Quite simply because he has reinvented Nashville rather than discovered it, even the most spontaneous and wayward elements in his s-f fantasy remain firmly within his grasp. Starting with the campaign van, Hamilton with his mistress (Barbara Baxley) and son (Dave Peel) and musicians, an English groupie-interviewer named Opal (Geraldine Chaplin), a black gospel group with white lead singer Linnea (Lily Tomlin)—and leaving it partially up to the viewer to decide on the relative importance of each, to discriminate between characters and extras (a task not unlike that faced by most of the film's inhabitants)—Altman proceeds to shuffle these mini-plots while casually adding fourteen characters more, as everyone but Opal and Linnea appears or reappears at the airport; then deals them out in orderly succession as they leave the parking lot, finally assuming a recognisable narrative shape; and scrambles most of them again when they become caught in a freakish highway pile-up, to be joined by Linnea, Opal and others.

'Nashville': Barbara Harris, Karen Black



One proceeds through this constant play between organisation and chaos as though in a mystery, picking out threads that may be either loose ends or clues to future events—an aspect that makes *Nashville* well worth repeated visits. Cutting between the fatuous affirmations of Hamilton's song ('We must be doin' somethin' right to last 200 years') and the more unbridled ones of the gospel group establishes one kind of contrast, but when Opal starts prattling over the sound of the latter about 'darkest Africa' and 'naked frenzied bodies', our attention and response become further subdivided. Similarly, when she is holding forth about American violence during the traffic jam, what's funny isn't merely the delivery of her hysterical clichés in medium shot and screen centre, but the relationship between that and the sheer irrelevancy of a little boy outside the car in left foreground, simultaneously consuming an ice-cream cone like a detail out of Tati or Brueghel.

With the recurring juxtapositions of performers with spectators, insiders (Timothy Brown, Allan Nicholls, Cristina Raines) with outsiders (Robert Doqui, David Hayward, Bert Remsen), contrasts between public and private behaviour frequently come to the fore—epitomised by Connie White (Karen Black) trying on a variety of smiles while waiting to appear on the Opryland stage—and deceptions involving telephones become a minor leitmotif. If Barbara Jean (Ronee Blakley) is the only character who seems incapable of such duplicity, this may not be unrelated to her climactic 'breakdown' during a concert, which hinges on a lack of separation between private and public identities. Clearly the most professional of the singers, whose songs are least mediated by any sort of irony in their presentation, she is also the one who abandons herself most nakedly in her performances.

That she turns out to be the assassin's target seems to square with Altman's sense of cosmic injustice—formerly evidenced by the death of the hero in *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, the Coke bottle victim in *The Long Goodbye*, and equally present here in the sudden irrelevant speech of Pfc. Kelly (Scott Glenn) to Mr. Green (Keenan Wynn) just after the latter has learned of his wife's death. Cruelly twisting the screw, Altman cuts from his strangled sobs to the laughter of Opal and Triplette (Michael Murphy) in another scene, as if to underline the isolation of his grief. And to compound the



sense of absurdity, it is Green's angry departure from his wife's funeral in search of his groupie niece (Shelley Duvall) that indirectly causes the assassination to take place.

Some characters—Duvall, David Arkin's chauffeur, Jeff Goldblum's magician—are static figures to be brought on like running gags; Opal and Tom (Keith Carradine) are more diversified versions of the same principle. But others are subject to development, elucidation and modification, either in their behaviour or in the way they are presented. Linnea, whom we learn to identify with humane impulses, is briefly seen at Hamilton's party describing the results of various traffic injuries with apparent relish; Hamilton's son, bashful and courteous at the same party, becomes a drunken lout at the fund-raising campaign smoker where Sueleen (Gwen Welles) does a striptease, while Sueleen herself shifts during this scene from a comic character to a tragic one. And after driving Sueleen home, Linnea's cuckolded husband (Ned Beatty) suddenly launches a clumsy seduction attempt of his own.

Alongside these uncertainties about characters are ambiguities involving events. The film offers evidence but no proof about which of Tom's four ladies he dedicates his new song to; and we may wonder whether Barbara Jean's behaviour at her concert actually constitutes a breakdown—or if it does, whether this is partially provoked by her husband (Allen Garfield) forcing her off the stage. We don't know if she dies after being shot at the political rally or why, indeed, she is shot at all.

Does Opal work for the BBC? She repeatedly claims she does, and most reviewers have followed her lead, often going on to criticise the part in those terms. But if Opal's scene with Triplette had included more of the original footage, in which she admits that she *doesn't* work for the BBC, her character would have been assigned another label, and in each subsequent scene would have registered differently. Multiplying this detail by twenty-four, one easily sees why the film should have been much longer, and how extensively our chancy and partial experience of it is a response to *work in progress*, the unfolding of a narrative complex rather than its ultimate destination. Thus to stop the movie at a precise meaning—and worse yet, a socio-political one—is to rob it of its complexity and consign it to the same dustbin of platitudes that Opal and Hal Phillips Walker

both specialise in accumulating.

Not that Altman is entirely blameless in eliciting such a misplaced impulse. *Nashville* begins with a crowd of actors-as-extras—inviting us to ramble like tourists over the busy landscape, picking our own points of entry, our mixtures and degrees of interest—and ends with a crowd of extras-as-documentary-subjects, obliging us to accept them as emblems of some higher order, with the Nashville Parthenon and three screen-filling shots of the American flag to point the way. The camera zooms back to take in the entire spectacle of crowd, edifice and flag, yet the effect is constricting rather than expansive—a world of diverse possibilities shrunk to the dimensions of a Statement. Then another, recorded version of 'It Don't Worry Me', the emblematic theme song with which Barbara Harris' aspiring singer has lulled the crowd and forged her own unexpected ascendancy, is heard over the final credits, neatly balancing the film's hard-sell introduction, which also suggested the abstracting of a complex into a commodity. Acknowledging itself as a piece of merchandise, complete with packaging, price tag and succinct catalogue description, *Nashville* leaps from its exciting and individual state of grace—the open process of its initial making, and the better part of its unravelling—into the limited vocabulary and closed circuits of a public forum.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

## The Wind and the Lion

Fulfilling his claim to be 'Hollywood's resident expert on legendary Americans', John Milius seems to date to have laid the groundwork for both a continuing saga and a personal reminiscence on the making of America. His selection of heroes, from Evel Knievel through Judge Roy Bean and Jeremiah Johnson to John Dillinger, suggests a series of variations on a national style that is part uninhibited adventurer and part showground huckster. In Theodore Roosevelt (an ample and endearing portrait by Brian Keith of the romantic hero as political blusterer), Milius clearly has another character to offer unabashed justification for a 'cult of personality' reading of history, one of those figures around whom events can breathlessly congregate, waiting for the chosen individual to give them meaning and direction.

The events in this case concern a ruffling of diplomatic feathers in turn-of-the-century Morocco, out of which Milius confects his own individual brand of old-fashioned romance, and intimates that this 'international incident' is a kind of first bleeding for the ebulliently naive President and his equally inexperienced nation in the realities of a global power struggle. The man whom Roosevelt comes to see as his enemy, and therefore someone with whom he can develop a genuine sense of kinship, is Mulay Ahmed Muhammed el Raisuli the Magnificent, Sherif of the Rifian Berbers and a brigand in the cause of winning sovereignty for his people from rulers corrupted by the intrusions of foreign powers. As his opening gambit to embarrass his country's throne, and to broadcast his demands to the Westerners who are staking their own claims in Morocco, Raisuli (Sean Connery) one day leads his band in a wild charge through the streets of Tangier to kidnap and hold to ransom American widow Eden Pedecaris (Candice Bergen) and her two children.

Pressured from all sides, the Sultan of Morocco delays in reaching an agreement with Raisuli, and the politician in Roosevelt considers taking forceful action to avenge this insult to the nation (and is urged by his advisers to do so as a vote-winning ploy in the coming Presidential election), while the sportsman in him despatches a telegram to Raisuli to ask what sort of rifle he carries. In the event, the decision to intervene is taken by lesser men, the government of Morocco is overthrown by American marines, Mrs. Pedecaris is recovered and Raisuli captured by the European forces (from whom he is finally freed by his former hostage). But the kudos—and the election, of course—goes to Roosevelt, whose presence dominates *The Wind and the Lion* (Columbia-Warner), despite the fact that his role is almost that of a bystander in the wings—an annotator, however, to the hidden drama of America's own rise to power, in one long soliloquy promoting the grizzly bear as the true symbol of the nation, not 'that ridiculous eagle... no more than a dandified vulture,' and predicting that the two are fated to be respected and perhaps feared but certainly not loved. There may be a slight ironic distance between Roosevelt's extrovert statements of political intent ('What do I want? I want respect! That's what. Respect for human life and American property, and I'll send the Atlantic squadron to Morocco to get respect') and Milius' view of them. But generally the President's braggadocio, self-confidence and innocent vision seem a match for the director's own romantic notions about all levels of political activity.

Milius' problem in *The Wind and the Lion* is that Roosevelt and Raisuli can never face each other on the same battlefield, on the kind of mock-Olympian terrain where John Dillinger and his FBI adversary circled and finally merged with one another in the identity of their myth-making ambitions. The Berber chief can be likened to the President in the means and ends of his ambition only by becoming something of a caricature of him, and thus drifting close to the stereotype of exotic warlords in so many desert epics. Milius never completely extricates himself from the difficulty, but he devises a few shrewd strategies by way of camouflage. Unobtrusively sidetracking the expected clichés, he allows the relationship between Raisuli and Mrs. Pedecaris to progress from her outraged hostility and his amused disdain to a mutually wary testing and accommodation of cultural antipathies, but never as far as the beginning of real romance. Their aphoristic exchanges give an absurd tilt to the differences between them, and tie in with a comically tangled skein of metaphors throughout the movie, starting with the title, in which the various parties to the dispute identify themselves with the forces of the natural world.

*The Wind and the Lion* is also situated



'The Wind and the Lion': Sean Connery, Candice Bergen



comfortably within the old-fashioned genre which it has largely made over to other ends. The Panavision format is adeptly handled, particularly in the two roistering sequences of Raisuli's raid and the marines' seizure of power, and the Boy's Own strain of the story surfaces casually through the presence of Eden's son William (Simon Harrison), who is the quickest to forget their plight as hostages and to look admiringly on Raisuli. Invoking rather more dubious forms of innocence, Milius treats the American diplomats and military men on the spot as children taking their first reckless try at a power game in which they're surrounded by more experienced and carnivorous European players. It is hard to believe that Milius did not have *The Wild Bunch* in mind for the climactic march of the marines who join Mrs. Pedecaris in an attempt to rescue Raisuli from the Germans; but without Peckinpah's sense of the manic destructiveness as well as the ingenuous enthusiasm of these adventurer-children, the scene tends simply to slide into a hearty jingoism.

Rising above the manipulations of the minor figures, the image-making of Roosevelt and Raisuli partakes of a limitless personal vision, with both convinced of the divine rightness and guaranteed immortality of their acts, even while Milius is insisting with bluff good humour that his heroes must also have feet of clay. As the President is honoured on his birthday with a speech in which his breath is likened to a wind that 'bends the trees of aggression and injustice', he is presented with a cake decorated with a map of his next entrepreneurial undertaking—the Panama Canal—and on blowing out the candles is warned by an adviser that it 'takes a big wind—lots of hot air.'

RICHARD COMBES

## Some Call It Loving

On the face of it, a series of outlandish imponderables: Robert Troy (Zalman King), a moody white jazz musician, occupies a baroque mansion overlooking the Pacific with Scarlett (Carol White) and Angelica (Veronica Anderson) who sleep together and devote their waking hours to acting out his erotic fantasies—pornographic emblems which become oddly chaste through their highly formalised enactments (dancing nuns, mistress-and-maid rituals)

—while his 'best' and only friend Jeff (Richard Pryor), a black derelict dying of drugs and drink, worships his saxophone playing at a local nightclub... At a carnival, Troy comes upon a Sleeping Beauty sideshow, where a depraved-looking hawker in a doctor's suit (Logan Ramsey) invites the male spectators to try to wake Jennifer (Tisa Farrow) with a kiss for the price of a dollar. Casually forking over \$20,000, Troy purchases the slumbering teenager instead, along with the potion which keeps her asleep, drives her back to the mansion and waits for her to open her eyes. When she eventually does, she promptly falls in love with him, perfectly embodies the 1950s high school fantasies that he recollects and re-enacts, and eagerly joins the erotic charades of Scarlett and Angelica—until he despairingly puts her back to sleep and returns her to the carnival. There he assumes the hawker's doctor outfit and invites spectators to kiss Jennifer for a dollar, echoing the warning of his predecessor that 'To wake the Sleeping Beauty, you run the risk of being awakened yourself.'

Spectators who like to keep their fairy tales innocent, their pornography sordid, their allegories obvious and their dreams intact are bound to be disconcerted by James B. Harris' haunting *Some Call It Loving* (Pleasant Pastures), which pursues the improbabilities of dream logic to clarify rather than mystify, and tough-mindedly concerns itself with the processes and consequences of dreaming as well as its objects. Worlds apart from the Cold War thriller mechanics of *The Bedford Incident* (1965), Harris' one previous feature, it is equally distinct from the somnambulist conceits of early American Underground like Anger and Harrington, which it only superficially resembles. Unique and alone, it remains obstinately and superbly unclassifiable. Its only plausible precedents are the quite dissimilar short story by John Collier, 'Sleeping Beauty', which served as its starting point, and the film of *Lolita*, which Harris produced and helped to script.

It was significantly during the production of *Lolita* that Harris reportedly first located the kernel of his theme, some twelve years before he realised it; and *Some Call It Loving* bears all the earmarks of an intuitive conception that has been developed, sifted and refined over a long period of time, reduced to a hard algebra of essentials which carries total conviction within its own rather singular terms. Conventionally filmed, acted as though under a glass bell—discounting

only Pryor's remarkable disassembled performance—and accompanied by a score (by Richard Hazard and Bob Harris) so sensually right that it reverses the usual pattern and seems accompanied by the images, it has a style that can be comfortably described only through musical analogies: one of disenchanted lyricism, or of circular lament. And viewers unable to catch this melody remain stranded on the elements of artifice which compose it, looking for naturalism in a film whose verisimilitude is wholly internal and whose narrative—once the threads are properly identified—is completely functional.

The circularity of Robert Troy's quest helps to determine much of its potential fascination, along with its ultimate futility. The coloured lights which shine through soft focus in the carnival reappear on the bandstand of the jazz club, underlining how easily the solipsistic purity of a private dream can grow both out of and into the basic materials of a corrupt mass entertainment, and how innocence and corruption—however apparently antithetical—can each bear the seed of its precise opposite. Recalling her years spent asleep as a bad dream, Jennifer speaks of a void interrupted by episodes when she was kissed, pawed and otherwise violated by strangers, without any power to resist; yet after a while, she tells Troy—with a face and language which seem scraped out of high school yearbooks—she began to prefer these interruptions to the emptiness that surrounded them: doesn't this mean, she concludes, that she was only waiting for him to wake her?

Thus situating herself in one fantasy in order to fulfil the dictates of another, the 'virginal' princess willingly becomes a whore to satisfy the corruptions of a dreamer who remains chaste—who in fact returns her to the public domain so that his romantic dreams can remain uncontaminated by experience, making her once again an unwitting whore in fact, an ideal sleeping beauty in image. If such a process succinctly describes the contradictions of the Hollywood dream factory, as Tom Milne has proposed, this is far from the only meaning to be extracted from this luminous and hallucinatory work, which spreads its net wider and plunges still deeper. It might also be regarded as Huysmans' *A Rebours* rewritten as a children's book, or—if we consider Pryor and the willing nightclub waitress who performs a cheerleader striptease, along with the mansion's human and inanimate playthings—a landscape of wish fulfilments which blots out the very possibility of continued dreaming. 'In dreams begin responsibilities,' wrote Yeats, who also wondered, 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?' How, indeed, can we know the dreamer from the dream?

Trying to preserve his sense of awakened possibility—perhaps the only shred of innocence he has left—Troy drives away from the mansion with Jennifer; their nearly wordless and directionless flight, closely evoking the travels of Humbert and Lolita, ultimately takes them to a motel where a jewel-like neon sign reading 'Fantasy' announces the end-point of Troy's quest beyond dreaming, after which there is nowhere left to go but back to the mansion, and towards another ritual returning Jennifer to her sleep.

As suggested above, the dance of *Some Call It Loving* is essentially a function of the melody which animates it—and on which Troy, as musician-dreamer, plays his endless variations. Like the jukebox records which set in motion the successive fantasies embodied by Scarlett and Angelica ('corrupt' convent vaudeville, in the form of a tap-dance and tango) and Troy and Jennifer ('innocent' high school prom, in the form of a Nat 'King' Cole single), this melody can transform inconsequential passing fragments—a sailboat on the sea, a curving camera movement on a stairway, a glimpse of Angelica in a white dress on the terrace—into moments of magical revelation and promise. But as the rest of the film reminds us, all such prom-

'Some Call It Loving': Tisa Farrow as the Sleeping Beauty





ises become doomed simply by assuming flesh—a vicious circle made gentle and bitter-sweet by Harris' lyrical inflections, and turned into a yearning lament for the self-sustaining power of the dreams themselves, which obliterates all possibilities of fulfilment in its wake.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

## Autobiography of a Princess

The fact that *Autobiography of a Princess* is the richest and most dense Merchant/Ivory production for some years testifies to the importance of writer Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (missing over the last few films) to their particular set-up. Her script not only makes some of the most probing comments on the Anglo-Indian scene by a foreign writer since Forster, but works them into a closely knit tapestry of words and images which constantly counterpoint and contradict each other. An ageing English teacher and writer, formerly tutor and private secretary to an Indian Maharajah, makes his annual tea-party visit to the Maharajah's daughter, now living out a relatively comfortable exile in a quiet London flat decorated with mementoes of an Imperial India long since vanished. As the princess and the tutor (Madhur Jaffrey and James Mason) reminisce about the past, she shows him news film of old court ceremonials, of events and people they both remember (culled, in fact, from valuable archive material, both public and private, which Merchant and Ivory found in India).

Slowly and subtly, we see how their memories have shaped their present lives—their varieties of exile—and how these memories diverge. For the Princess, it was all excitement and 'tops', as she remembers her father as a benevolent ruler hampered by old traditions, who was fond of practical jokes which upset the other Princes and who despatched her to Europe to a boarding school and an independent way of life 'where I could take my place in the modern world.' Watching the same flickery pictures which also formed his own past, the tutor's initial interest and warmth soon merge into darker memories as he recalls the hot, idle and ultimately hollow days—'most of the time I did nothing, just rotted from the heat'—when all the ceremonies seemed boring and mystifying and alien, and his relationship with the Maharajah entered a painfully personal phase—'I found I couldn't live without him.' Thus, through a series of suggestions and echoes, hints of dark secrets (fully known to the two characters) are gradually imparted to us.

Ivory and Jhabvala bring the Indian past into our present by an audacious juggling of film within film. First we have the news material seen on the screen in the Princess' flat, quite well shot for home movies but still rather raw; then a simulated, glossy TV documentary programme 'Through Their Eyes', also projected on the screen, comprising interviews with various members of the deposed Indian aristocracy who talk ruefully of their present reduced financial state and the condition of their palatial residences back home—'We used to live in as many houses as possible to stop them being confiscated by the Government.' Then, towards the end, Mason's mainly bad memories are illustrated by sudden cut-in shots of goats being beheaded and ceremonial gunfire, which are strictly removed from the film's 'present' time; similarly, as they recall the incident which apparently caused the Maharajah's downfall (he was discovered with 'a common English woman' at the Savoy), we cut directly to a reconstruction of a bedroom scene which neither character could have experienced. The clear, precise editing rhythm imposed by Ivory and his English cutter, Humphrey Dixon, makes all these time manipulations seem entirely natural within the conventions the film has set up for itself.



'Autobiography of a Princess': James Mason

By a mixture of luck and judgment, Merchant and Ivory obtained the perfect casting for this virtually two-character film (rehearsed and shot, incidentally, in just over a week). Madhur Jaffrey, fussing over the teacups and prattling away in schoolgirl phrases about her first English governess from Shropshire, wallowing in the richer memories and fending off the more contentious ones, is precisely matched by Mason's deeply felt, subjective playing, his face slowly darkening as an image from the Maharajah's movies strikes a sour chord—'I remember asking His Highness about the singing girls. He said they probably died of pox in the bazaar—I suppose he was joking.' Both players sustain long monologues with effortless control, in scenes which were shot in single takes and seemingly made more concentrated by the close quarters shooting in the flat.

In a triumphant stroke at the end, all these memories and ghostly shadows are brought together in the Princess' recollection of an old court musician 'who just lives in a little hole in the wall', whose singing seems to recall all the 'wonderful things' of that time. The wizened old lady's face transfigured by her song fades into the mundane, defiantly unexotic London setting, but the music continues as the Princess makes her farewells to her old friend, thrusting a bag of cakes into his hand to help him on his way back to the country. 'You just have to learn to manage,' she says at one point; and in the space of an hour, director, writer and players conjure up a whole world of allusion and illusion—an elegy for a past age viewed without bias or contempt but with subtle understanding.

JOHN GILLET

## Posse

A production still for *Posse* (CIC) shows Bruce Dern, as the notorious outlaw Jack Strawhorn, leaning nonchalantly against a wanted notice which proves upon closer inspection to be a campaign poster for Marshal Howard Nightingale (Kirk Douglas), the lawman running for the U.S. Senate on a policy of outlaw extermination. It's a pleasant conceit in view of the film's thesis that distinctions tend to get

blurred when political ends justify criminal means; even pleasanter in that the shot doesn't actually appear in the film, which prefers to make its points without too many nudges.

Marshal Nightingale, for instance, rides with his prisoner into the little town of Tesota, Texas, to a triumphal welcome from all but the traditionally sceptical newspaper editor (James Stacy). Martial in bearing, military in the precision with which he deploys his posse, he graciously submits to an interview. 'You're too ambitious, Marshal,' the editor remarks. 'My commanding officer was an ambitious man and he became a general; I became a civilian.' Casually phrased, apparently referring to Nightingale's political plans and his association with the railway company that is preparing to encroach on local freedoms, the comment begins to reverberate with sharper significance when one realises—and the connection is totally unstressed—that it is being expressed by an army veteran with only one arm and one leg.

Not that *Posse* is in any way elliptical or even particularly profound. Anti-heroes being what they are these days, the message rings out loud and clear right from the pre-credits sequence in which Strawhorn watches grimly while Nightingale and a hand-picked posse of six men give his outlaw gang the choice of being burned alive or shot dead. Should any doubts still linger, the scroll accompanying the main title card—an American eagle surmounted by the legend 'To the Polls, ye Sons of Freedom'—soon dispels them. In this Nixonian West, the pursuit of power is enough to turn a good guy into a bad one.

The fun of the film comes partly from a brilliantly inventive and well paced script by William Roberts and Christopher Knopf, and partly from the skill with which the two stars play off their oneupmanship duel against each other. Predictable it may be, but the pay-off moment when Strawhorn cashes in on an age-old dictum ('Honest men only stay honest so long as they're paid') to cut the ground from under Nightingale's feet by luring his posse away from him, still contrives to arrive by a delightfully unexpected route. Bruce Dern perhaps tends on occasion to overplay the whimsical charm that is his character's own vote-catching speciality; but the point, after



all, is that Strawhorn responds directly to people with both curiosity and courtesy, whereas Nightingale is exclusively concerned with his image.

From this comes the real meat of the film, exposed in the long and complex sequence in which Nightingale returns to enjoy his hero's welcome from the townsfolk. As he makes his vote-hunting speech of thanks from an improvised rostrum outside the courthouse, the camera cuts unobtrusively away at beautifully judged intervals: to Strawhorn applauding ironically from his cell window high above; to various members of the posse sneaking off to assignments with civic wives and daughters; to husbands and fathers gradually realising that their womenfolk are missing; and to the buxom hotel-keeper Mrs. Ross (Beth Brickell) becoming uncomfortably aware of Strawhorn's caustic gaze as she hopefully eyes her hero. The sequence closes on an explosion of fireworks and dancing, and opens again next morning with a brass band and cheering crowds giving the Marshal a regal send-off at the railway station. But the feeling in the town—neatly focused in the interval by Mrs. Ross' disappointment when she makes a goodnight play for Nightingale and is repulsed because he has to think of his position—has now begun to go sour; and having unwittingly undermined his own position, Nightingale stands poised on the brink of a Watergate soon to be gleefully precipitated by Strawhorn.

Here directing his second film after making such a mess of *Scalawag*, Kirk Douglas seems to have learned how to direct for the camera rather than at it, not least in the throwaway technique he adopts for key lines which would be destroyed by undue emphasis. "What do we pay taxes for?" an indignant voice wails out of the confusion when a burning train heralds the return of the outlaw now holding the marshal prisoner; and somewhere at the edge of the frame, almost obscured by a cut, one is just aware of the newspaper editor holding up one of the election posters and murmuring "To deliver us from evil!" Similarly, with the minor characters let loose to carry on a life of their own beyond the needs of the plot, the town itself imperceptibly begins to take over from Strawhorn and Nightingale as chief protagonist. Which is just as it should be in a film about the firing of a demagogue's auto-destruct mechanism.

TOM MILNE

brings in the all-important element of interpretation. *Smile* has been seen, like *Taking Off*, as a misanthropic statement, a blistering indictment of false values and tastelessness in American life. But it does not come over that way. Ritchie, like Forman, is engaged with his people, however awful they may seem to be and however foolishly they behave. And he takes particular pleasure in showing us how much people can love terrible things, how much real effort and dedication can go into the most apparently trashy and pointless activities.

And how far, despite all this effort and dedication, they can go wrong. The teenage beauty contest in Santa Rosa which forms the central matter of *Smile* is and remains throughout the film absurd and grotesque. But the people who believe in it are not dismissed because of that; Ritchie even seems to see something touching in their dedication. A key moment comes near the end of the film, when the judges are shaping up to their final decision. The president, 'Big Bob' Freeland (Bruce Dern), a local car salesman, is a little abstracted, as well he might be, with his best friend taking to drink and pot shots at his wife, while 'Little Bob', a precocious Peeping Tom, has been handed over to a psychiatrist for observation. As a guide line the judges refer back to the original rules, by which the Young American Miss has to be talented, charming, concerned with other people. Suddenly Big Bob surfaces to endorse these formulations with surprising vehemence: they are good, desirable qualities, aren't they? Aren't they?

Well, yes and no. But then, as Ritchie sees it, the answer to life is yes and no. We see the contest itself go sour among the contestants. But not too sour—just to the extent that all competitions bring out the worst as well as the best in people. A lot of the stages of the contest are very funny, and not overstated: the girl wandering round with a butter churn (we never find out what she does with it); the girl setting out ambitiously to sing a very difficult Rodgers and Hart song for the first time with live musicians instead of tape ('I didn't know there was any difference'; 'That's what keeps us working, honey'); the girl whose only talent is packing suitcases. The irony is inherent; it seems to be in the eye of the beholder.

And meanwhile, round the edges people go quietly insane. The man who makes the trophies (Nicholas Pryor) is becoming the town drunk; his wife, the queen bee of the

contest (Barbara Feldon) is frigid and domineering. And their mutual misunderstanding comes to a head in a wonderful scene in which the husband, returning to their beautiful family home (Motel-style) after a hard night to find the newly shampooed carpet under wraps and his wife dismissing his announcement that he thinks he is going crazy as just another tiresome attempt to sabotage her work for the contest, kicks the head off a monstrous ceramic animal by the fireplace. Her reaction, weeping over it like an injured child, is funny and touching (it is horrible but she really loves it), and the conclusion, with him coolly threatening suicide and then turning the gun on her (only a flesh wound, naturally) is marvellously carried off. As her best friend observes the next evening, in one of those slightly tangled statements for which Jerry Belson's script shows a wonderfully acute ear, 'He doesn't know how lucky he is to be leaving a person like you.'

*Smile* is one of those seemingly casual, loosely knit films in which, finally, every touch counts and nothing is inessential. The scene, the houses in which the various characters live, the dialogue they speak, is right on target. Ritchie gives a feeling of dimension by showing us only small parts of his characters' lives at the moment they happen to impinge on one another, showing us (it is an old Olmi technique) how much of what goes on in life is relevant mainly to situations and stimuli we can only guess at. His characters are as awful and as estimable, as muddled and as contradictory, as people we actually know in what we laughingly call real life. And the shock of reality is as tonic as it is rare in the cinema today.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

## Elektreia

In an interview with Jean-Louis Comolli and Michel Delahaye, Miklós Jancsó suggested, 'It seems to me that there is no history, only particular versions of it.' He would probably say the same thing about myths. In his latest film *Elektreia* (Academy/Connoisseur), Jancsó has dealt with the Electra myth. In the past he has generally tackled actual historical events (as he did, say, in *The Red and the White* and *The Round-Up*) and given his version of the event. In classical times Aeschylus, Euripides and

## Smile

To praise a film primarily for its human qualities always sounds rather like a get-out: the film-maker's heart is in the right place even if his camera conspicuously isn't. Michael Ritchie's new film *Smile* (United Artists) certainly needs no such apologetic support; he is technically as canny as anyone now working in the American cinema. But the fact remains that what one carries away from the film is most strikingly an attitude towards people and an unexpectedly complex response to a particular place and way of life. He does manage to an amazing degree to make the film into a transparent envelope through which one can see the contents with a minimum of apparent interference.

No doubt Ritchie's *cinéma-vérité* background (he worked for a while with the Maysles brothers) has something to do with this. But the film is no more *cinéma-vérité* than is *Taking Off* or *Un Certain Jour*. The comparisons are not arbitrarily chosen. Ritchie is a realist in almost exactly the same sense that Forman and Olmi are realists. He observes the surfaces and processes with meticulous accuracy, but his prime interest, obviously, is the people and what makes them tick. And this, naturally,

'Posse': Bruce Dern, Kirk Douglas





Sophocles all delineated aspects of the Electra myth, laying emphasis on Electra's hostility to her mother and the power she exerted over her brother, Orestes. In more modern times the Strauss-von Hofmannsthal partnership, Eugene O'Neill, Giraudoux, Sartre and Cacoyannis have given their versions of the myth.

Jancsó's film is based on a stage play by the Hungarian dramatist László Gyurkó. Gyurkó portrayed Electra as an avenger and Orestes as a placator. Jancsó expands on this. He shows Electra as being oppressed by Aegisthus; this causes her to become a militant revolutionary who overthrows Aegisthus' rule and frees the people from his tyranny. The play provides Jancsó with ample scope for his dialectics on the nature of power wielded by the oppressor and the ways and means employed by the victims to shift that oppression. Such folkloristic devices as parables, allegories, psalms and myths (with all their attendant symbolism and ritual) have tended to mould Jancsó's films—certainly his features shot in colour. *Red Psalm* is a quintessential parable.

Like that film, *Elektra* was shot on the Hungarian Plain. The details (the dancing, language, music, whip-cracking and so on) are all Hungarian. They happen to be Hungarian. That they are is really incidental; the precise setting is immaterial to Jancsó's theme. The costumes are timeless—Jancsó is not alone, O'Neill set his play far, far away from Greece of the City States. What is more important is such details as the colour of the costumes—the girls, for instance, are in virginal blue. Jancsó even uses a red (or Red) helicopter in his film. After all, wasn't there a jet plane in the sky in Buñuel's *Simon of the Desert*? Rather like Ganymede being snatched from the earth by an eagle and taken to heaven and Christ resurrected from the tomb, Electra and Orestes are removed from the land of the oppressed and taken aloft. When they return in the same vehicle they land in a country freed from inequality and the oppressor.

Like *Red Psalm*, the film pleads for a revolution to free the oppressed, but Jancsó has yet to show that arcadia on earth follows revolution. Like *Red Psalm*, *Elektra* sees a virtuoso display of camerawork by János Kende—the integration of craning, tracking, zooming and panning has never been so smooth. The film consists of a mere thirteen takes. Like *Red Psalm*, horses, lines of people and smoke move back and forth in front of the camera and around it. . . Yet here this flux seems a mere incidental background to the central drama of Electra (played by Mari Töröcsik), Aegisthus (József Madaras) and Orestes (György Cserhalmi). The fission that is evident between the principals and the extras in *Elektra* is probably not accidental. *Red Psalm* focused attention on a movement; *Elektra* focuses on individuals. Once again Jancsó seems to be saying that revolution (a violent revolution at that, not one 'of flowers') is the way to free an oppressed society.

Despite leaving history behind and handling a myth, *Elektra* could well be deemed and damned as a repetition of much that Jancsó has handled and said in his previous features. Certainly, the themes have been outlined before by Jancsó; but, as always, the film is a beautiful visual experience. His films in colour have all had a separate and individual hue: *The Confrontation* had those summer tones of Cézanne's Provence, *Agnus Dei* the delicate washes of a Giotto fresco, *Red Psalm* the primary colours of a medieval manuscript illustration, *Rome Wants Another Caesar* the sun-bleached quality of the desert. *Elektra* is suffused with the oranges and mauves of dusk and dawn. In effect really the colours are what an art historian would call 'Northern Light', so this too helps to dislocate the film from any expected classical setting. All the symbolic devices (smoke, the minstrel-commentator, capes, naked girls, humiliation, doves, lines,



'Elektra': Mari Töröcsik

ranks, mass murder, corporate movement, riders on horseback, resurrection, the sabre, human and stone circles, water . . .) that have appeared in Jancsó's films are used again. Such 'devices' can be interpreted as simply capes, doves, circles, etc. They are also integral to rituals, parables and rites, but they can also be viewed as allegories for something else. All Jancsó's oppressors (from *The Round-Up* onwards) wear capes; Aegisthus the tyrant wears one in *Elektra*. Such 'devices' are visual shorthand aids to identification: the person who wears a cape is an oppressor. Also, they are symbolic references to historical events (the naked herds of girls refer, probably, to those who filed into the gas chambers). As always, no explanation is given of such devices. They are merely part of the visual experience of the film.

*Rome Wants Another Caesar* seemed to threaten that Jancsó might revert from the long take sequence to a more conventional style of cutting. In conversation Jancsó has also hinted at this possibility. In more ways than one *Elektra* sees Jancsó on his now familiar way. Familiar, yes, but dazzling and much refined.

PETER DAY

## The Fortune

At the end of Mike Nichols' movie, the camera slowly tracks in to the heroine, Fredricka (or Freddie) Quintessa Bigard, a runaway heiress of the 1920s, sitting on a car running board with a pet chicken at her feet, all set to run away again. A detective is telling her that the two gentlemen she has been living with—Oscar Sullivan (Jack Nicholson) and Nicky Strumpo (Warren Beatty)—have been trying desperately to murder her and grab her inheritance. 'Oh no!' she says plangently, 'I would never believe that in a million years!' The camera then gracefully pirouettes 180 degrees, finally picking up the threesome (with chicken) sauntering back arm in arm into their decaying bungalow, the neighbours peering furiously.

*The Fortune* (Columbia-Warner) is full of things one would never believe in a million years: the whole series of bungled murder attempts, for instance (death by a poisonous snake, which dies itself before it can show its paces; death by drowning in an ornamental lily-pond; a suicide attempt in which the bewildered victim is washed up on Long Beach inside a trunk). It's also difficult to believe in Oscar and Nicky; right to the end they resolutely remain Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty on holiday from their usual roles. Beatty,

the archetypal 1920s sharpster, has slicked-down hair, a rakish moustache and a gruff manner; Nicholson, his childish side-kick, with ruffled hair and a puckish way of pursing his lips, plays Laurel to his Hardy (and odd scenes directly suggest the parallel).

Obviously, the silly season Nichols entered with *The Day of the Dolphin* is still in progress. Yet it would be churlish to pass up this frivolous entertainment too rapidly, particularly when so many things could have gone disastrously wrong. An early gag in the movie hints at the no-clichés-barred approach of *What's Up Doc?*: at a railway station Nicky and Oscar push a trolley containing Freddie (highly comatose) and luggage; an argument begins and the trolley continues its journey unattended. But the expected chase and slapstick never materialise; the trolley stops dead a few yards further on and we cut to another scene. Throughout, Nichols rarely forces our attention on the jokes or the period setting (discreetly conjured up by Richard and Anthea Sylbert, with a handful of vintage songs on the soundtrack adding support); his shooting style is as uncluttered as it was in *Carnal Knowledge*, allowing the script and performances to dominate.

True, this approach has vices along with virtues. Beatty's playing is too dour for comfort, and the regular brawls are eventually wearisome. And Adrian Joyce's script, unlike Feiffer's for *Carnal Knowledge*, doesn't fully survive the scrutiny of Nichols' spotlight. The opening sequences, in which Oscar is blackmailed into marrying Freddie and the trio embark on an ethically dubious relationship, suggest moral complexities which disappear halfway through, annoyingly unexplored; the dialogue also contains a fair amount of verbiage, though there's a sufficient number of shapely lines as compensation ('I'm not lying around!' drawls Nicholson, lying around under a blanket, 'I haven't got entirely up yet!'). Undoubtedly Freddie—a kooky, well-heeled heroine in the tradition of crazy comedy—gets the biggest bite of the scriptwriter's cake, and stage actress Stockard Channing, in her first movie, creates a totally delectable person out of the stereotype. Her uneven, slightly dumpy features evince a thick-skinned composure which never falters, whether she's dancing a tango with her baby chick clutched in her hand or serving her cohabitants an experimental breakfast. 'Is it supposed to be kind of—slithery?' Nicholson hesitantly asks, chomping on some unnameable delicacy. 'I really don't know,' she airily replies, walking back to the oven and returning with a tray of nicely burnt bread rolls.

GEOFF BROWN



# BOOK REVIEWS

## FILM CENSORSHIP

By Guy Phelps

GOLLANCZ, £5.50

Perhaps the most telling phrase in this excellent book is that in which the author likens the film to an ordinary commercial consumer product: 'This chore [repeated re-viewings by the censors], together with the high percentage of poor quality exploitation films, makes the job considerably less appealing than might be imagined. Enthusiasm for the cinema is hard to maintain under these circumstances: on many days the films seen are no more entertaining or less repetitive than the average material inspected by any quality control department.'

When to this is added the penultimate chapter on 'Hidden Censorship', which surveys the complete lack of respect for the integrity of its films evinced by the industry, one is reminded that a major force behind film censorship in England has always been the trade itself. In fact, this thoroughly depressing chapter to some extent undermines the libertarian case against censorship, for one sees how unimportant a censor's cuts may in practice be in the context of the mangling by producers, distributors and TV companies—all of which is kept as secret as possible. The film is not even regarded as a can of beans, but rather as a string of sausages to be cut to length as required.

But film censorship is more than just cuts, and in any case it is an independent source of restriction which, moreover, has the force of law behind it, so that an independent-minded producer or distributor, however respectful he may be of a film, will still be unable to evade the censor. However distorted and minor an aspect of film distribution the commercial cinema may now be, it nevertheless remains the last bastion of formal administrative pre-censorship, and the manner in which it is carried out continues to be of importance.

In fact, it is increasingly forming part of the general pattern of content-restriction in England, which embraces the obscenity and race hatred laws as well, and it is not the least of the merits of this book to have in it a survey of the various pressure groups active in the area, especially the Festival of Light, which is spearheading the campaign against tolerance. It is also a measure of the com-

plexity of the present state of censorship affairs in Britain that, although the book is almost entirely devoted to the past ten years or so (apart from the second chapter, on the origin and development of censorship in England, which is largely summarised from previously published material), it nevertheless can barely skim the surface of that decade in some 240 pages.

What the author has done is first to gather together and disentangle all the strands which make up the fast moving picture of film censorship at the present moment, placing it in the context of the more general restrictive movements, and secondly to examine in some depth the actual practice of censorship within the BBFC and among the local licensing authorities. It is this latter field work which constitutes the truly original part of his work and the core of the book. But because of the wide ranging nature of the general picture he paints, Dr. Phelps is able, and sufficiently sophisticated, to interweave the results of his discussions with local councillors, BBFC examiners and others smoothly into the narrative, so that each contribution adds tellingly to our understanding of the working of the system.

Of the greatest assistance in this task has been the close working relationship established between the author and the then Secretary of the BBFC, Stephen Murphy. The chapter on 'Murphy's War' is the first adequate account of all the troubles that he has had to cope with. In some sense, indeed, the book could be regarded as a history of the Murphy regime, for it was Murphy's goodwill which opened the files and the staff of the BBFC to Dr. Phelps' questions and made possible a view of the mental processes inside the Board which even John Trevelyan's memoirs failed to give.

Dr. Phelps has not only mastered his secondary sources and done his field work, he also knows sufficient social psychology (thus revealing the connection with James Halloran's Centre for Mass Communication Research at Leicester University) to be able to analyse with some confidence the work done on the effect of obscene and violent films on viewers. Even his brief survey of 'Censorship around the World' shows a greater awareness of trends and recent developments

than is usual in such chapters, and almost persuades me to reverse the opinion I have expressed on occasion that censorship of films might be beginning to follow theatre censorship into oblivion, at least in the democracies.

It is this basic pessimism that leads the author to propose a reform which would exclude from the process of content-control of films both local authorities and the law ('The courts are bound to encounter the same difficulties as the local authorities as a result of their limited acquaintance with the cinema') and retain the BBFC but with altered internal structure and powers, greater public accountability through the re-introduction of annual reports, retention of the present classification, and official acceptance of private membership clubs outside the censorship system. I would myself be more radical in proposing change, but would agree fully with the author's concluding passage: 'As for the censorship of sex, violence and the rest, it is evident that "sick" material is only produced when there is a desire and a need for it. The real problem is not how to eradicate such matter from the screen, but how to produce a society in which such needs are less pervasive.'

NEVILLE HUNTINGS

## FILM CRITICISM AND CARICATURES, 1943-53

By Richard Winnington

Selected with an Introduction by Paul Rotha

ELEK, £5.95

Not many present-day newspaper critics would leap like salmon at the prospect of a volume dedicated to their weekly reviews. Nor should they. The restrictions of ever tighter deadlines and less than expansive space, to say nothing of editorial policy which requires coverage to be wider than weightier, scarcely make for the sort of copy that rests as well between hard covers as it can in feature pages hot from the press. But Richard Winnington, whose criticism and caricature adorned the pages of the *News Chronicle* from early 1943 until he died a decade later, published *Drawn and Quartered*, an anthology of his first five years, in 1948. Now Paul Rotha, his old friend and indefatigable admirer, has brought that now virtually unobtainable volume up to date with another, this time covering his whole career as a weekly film reviewer.

Winnington, unquestionably one of the best newspaper critics of his day, certainly deserves to be remembered. But one isn't wholly convinced that this is the best, or only, way to do it. He was clearly a little ahead of his time and streets in advance of many of his fellow critics, but his work, except the very best of it, still seems a little behind ours. It's not that critics today are writing better or more perceptively than

him. But attitudes to the cinema have moved on, there's much more room for qualitative doubt, and his forthright stance towards an art that no longer has to find an excuse for itself now sometimes looks a trifle foursquare too. 'When it comes to banditry in the woods,' he wrote of *Rashomon*, 'the Japanese are several moves ahead of Walt Disney.' True, but it doesn't seem much of an introduction now to one of the most extraordinary films of its era.

But those who live in glass-houses shouldn't sling stones. (I once called the young Francis Ford Coppola one of America's few Negro directors. And received a charming reply saying: 'No, I'm not. Just another Jew!') Winnington was right much more often than he was wrong. The way to prevent much carping is to read Rotha's introduction and the tributes that follow from Nicholas Bentley and Keith Mackenzie. They relate the man properly and eloquently to his time, tell us of his patent honesty, his refusal to be hoodwinked, his championing of films that would never otherwise have gained distribution in this country (Nicholas Ray's *They Live By Night*, for one), his just wrath at Wardour Street inanities, his infinite pains to elevate his particular job into something higher than it was when he was picked for it. It is to people like Winnington that some of us owe our present critical freedoms, incomplete as they may be.

His talent as a journalist and his basic love of cinema otherwise speaks for itself. He could scarcely be called a profound or original thinker. But he wasn't a shallow one either. And he could sometimes write like an angel, an avenging one at that. Not many others of his day were capable of penning that splendidly bitchy piece about Edward Dmytryk arriving in England 'trailing the glamour of his indictment.' Nor the crushing dissection of Hollywood's first—and widely overpraised—colour bar movies. 'Films that raise such issues and baulk them,' he wrote of *Pinky* and *Home of the Brave*, 'are not merely negative but dangerous.'

It is good to see so many of Winnington's best caricatures (those at least that were not lost and destroyed when his paper's throat was summarily cut), which summed up some of the films reviewed, and their stars, rather better than most of us could manage in writing. He was nobody's fool whichever kind of pen he used, but never fell into the critical trap of regarding himself as the one and only fount of wisdom. He had too much humour for that.

Only once in this collection does it seem to desert him, and that when printing a letter in his column from a navvy, written to let him know he had 'lots of supporters among us pick-and-shovel merchants.' But then the *Chronicle* was endearingly apt to trumpet its appeal to horny-handed sons of the soil when



worried about the rather predictable liberal sophistication of its other readers. Winnington generally shunned pretension like the plague, and wrote all the better for it. One wonders what he would have thought about some of today's pole-axingly dull examples of film surgery. Not much.

DEREK MALCOLM

# ALEXANDER KORDA: The Man Who Could Work Miracles

By Karol Kulik

W. H. ALLEN, £5.95

The trouble with miracles is that they seem so prosaic when they are explained. Unworthily, no doubt, we still hanker after a sense of wonder. Karol Kulik's biography of Korda is quite a good book, thoroughly researched, solidly written, informative, and filling, as they say, a felt want. But it is also curiously dispiriting to read, just because it leaves few of our romantic fantasies about Korda intact. He is presented not so much as a man who could work miracles, rather a man to whom a number of things happened which may have seemed miraculous on the time.

Take the famous Government loan of £3 million in 1948, which really put Korda and London films on their feet again. How did he get it? As Miss Kulik presents the matter, it dwindles to a very normal transaction in which, it would seem, Korda had little part at all. The Government's hand was forced by the Anglo-American film war to proffer direct financial aid to British film-makers. British Lion, the second largest production-distribution company in Britain, was close to financial collapse after a loss of over £2 million in the previous financial year, hence in most need of emergency support. And so Sir Wilfrid Eady (of subsequent Eady Fund fame) suggested that the newly set up National Film Finance Company (later Corporation) should rush the necessary £2 million, rapidly increased to £3 million, to British Lion at once, which they did. So, when you come down to it, it was not really a loan to Korda or his company, but to British Lion, which did distribute films of producers not directly affiliated with Korda, and it was a quick and practical (if perhaps insufficiently regulated) way of distributing aid to an important segment of the industry.

So far, so good. Of Korda's role in securing the loan we hear nothing: it is as though he just one morning received notification that the loan was coming, rather like winning the pools. But this is where one begins to jib a bit. So the loan was not strictly speaking to Korda. But he did own a controlling interest in British Lion, and London Films were the principal product distributed by British Lion, and there do not seem to have been any practical controls on what British Lion should do with

the loan and how it should be distributed among their producers. And anyway, British Lion was only by some distance the second largest company of its kind in Britain. What about Rank, which had also had losses in the previous year, if not so disastrous as British Lion's?

There must have been more to the business than meets the eye, or than reaches Miss Kulik's pages. Perhaps even after 27 years there are still toes around to be trodden on in Government circles. Almost certainly Korda was somehow instrumental in getting himself the loan, and no doubt his influence in the matter was palpable—his charm, his ability to cut a convincing figure as artist and businessman to people who knew little about film business and nothing about film art, his beguiling devotion (which on all the evidence dates back to his earliest days in Hungary) to England and the English, or at least to his romantic idealisation of them.

In other words Miss Kulik, for all her no-nonsense attitude to Korda's miracles, does not succeed in demythologising him at all. A miracle negotiated by a master showman is still easier to believe in than one which just comes out of the blue. What she has managed to do is to make Korda seem much less interesting than he actually was. For one thing, she seems to like almost none of his films—most of them are accorded a few brief words of description as they crop up (often in footnotes, further emphasising the feeling the book gives that the films themselves are incidental), generally ending with a snappy summation of what was wrong with them. And she makes little attempt herself to give us a feeling of the man's character. She goes very little into his anglophilia, his continuing determination to become a hundred per cent English gentleman. She quotes a number of specific instances of his charm in negotiation, and refers, mostly in rather vague general terms, to the other side of his nature, which could be malicious and destructive. But of the complex and contradictory whole these parts went to make we gain little clear idea.

And unfortunately she also tends to be rather sober-sided; she will solemnly retail and examine idiotic stories like Hans Habe's about the complete film version of *King Pausole* ('one of the most costly in the history of British film-making') which was shot in North Africa entirely as a way of recording the terrain for later military purposes and was never meant to be released, though none of the cast and crew realised this—as though such a thing could have happened to leave no trace in the trade papers of the period or anywhere else—but without apparently realising that the real point of the story is the fact that Korda was the sort of man about whom such legends naturally gathered.

There are also some odd little

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errors in the book. For example, Moholy-Nagy was not hired as a set designer for *Things to Come*, but as a deviser of special effects sequences, and it was certainly not just a charitable gesture on Korda's part, since the sequences were actually shot and still exist, though eliminated from the released version—because, Richard Kostelanetz darkly hints in his book on Moholy-Nagy, of 'professional jealousies'. By and large, however, the book is reliable and useful. But though it tries so hard to do so, it never manages to explain the Korda miracle, much less explain it away.

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

### KINGS OF THE BS: WORKING WITHIN THE HOLLYWOOD SYSTEM

Edited by Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn

E. P. DUTTON, NEW YORK, \$6.95

'The use of stock footage in *Thunda, King of the Congo* made it Eisensteinianly clear that the monkeys felt Buster Crabbe's antics were staged solely for their simian amusement.' Appearing near the end of Richard Thompson's valentine to Sam Katzman, this gloss offers a fair sample of the quirkiness and energy on display throughout much of McCarthy and Flynn's compendium of B and Z-movie lore. Mining a Hollywood strain first explored by Manny Farber and Andrew Sarris (who are both represented here) and various French critics of the MacMahonist persuasion (who are not), the editors have compiled a diverse array of largely fresh material—reviews, essays, interviews, filmographies—round their chosen topic, examining it as an economic and social phenomenon as much as an aesthetic one.

Producers from Val Lewton to Albert Zugsmith are treated as attentively as directors such as Joseph H. Lewis, Russ Meyer and Edgar G. Ulmer, and Roger Corman is interviewed under both capacities. Thus interest often vacillates between idealist, metaphysical and transcendental auteurist stances (*A Lawless Street* 'implies that abstract distinctions in the way one lives are meaningless in the face of the chaos underlying human society') and the more prosaic bread-and-butter observations of the entrepreneurs. After Herschell Gordon Lewis, for instance, has compared his *Blood Feast* to a Walt Whitman poem ('it's no good, but it's the first of its type and therefore deserves a certain position') and described in detail his methods of simulating gore with cranberry juice, gelatin and a sheep's tongue, the editors remark that he was once classified in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 'as a subject for future research', to which Lewis soberly replies: 'Well, they also say that about cancer.'

'The challenge,' writes Flynn, 'is to resurrect forgotten artists without being obscurantist; to celebrate

little glories in minor movies without being disproportionate; to praise odd genres and artists without being perverse.' Ironically, if understandably, it is the pieces which live up to this challenge—no-nonsense studies of *They Live By Night*, *Nightmare Alley*, *The Phenix City Story* and Altman's *The Delinquents*—which usually disappoint with their dryness, while the more zany schoolboy spitballs—Myron Meisel on Lewis and Ulmer, Thompson on *Thunder Road*—often delight through their rhetoric and hyperbole. ('*Detour* mercifully lasts little more than an hour, during which it compulsively grasps at the intolerable only to find it readily within its reach.')

To adapt a term from *Gravity's Rainbow*, the general focus of this book might be called the Preterite of the commercial cinema, in relation to the academy if not the box-office—the non-Elect and 'passed over' low-budget programmers which generally start life well past the point of redemption. Chronicling the triumphs of styles, personalities and sometimes merely bank accounts over the most dire adversities, *Kings of the Bs* offers a survey that is neither complete nor entirely selective. *Murder by Contract* has no reference in the index while *Girls in Chains* gets five; and the intercutting of stock footage of 'Hoover dam... at high noon' with a night scene in the latter is improbably construed as a brilliant riposte to Alain Resnais, a kind of cultural chauvinism that crops up elsewhere. But the area traced is a rich and various one, and some entertaining prospecting into its possibilities is to be found among this anthology's 561 pages.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ROD ALLEN is the editor of *Broadcast*... PETER DAY is the author of a forthcoming book on Jancsó, and co-author of the revised edition of *The Technique of Film Music*; also producer/director of an Arts Council documentary on the sculptor Phillip King... MICHAEL GRAHAM has acted in *Roma* and *Celine et Julie* and worked on the script of *Sévil*, to be directed by Eduardo De Gregorio... DEREK MALCOLM is film critic of *The Guardian*... PAUL MAYERSBERG is the author of a book, *Hollywood the Haunted House*, ex-editor of *Movie* magazine. *The Man Who Fell to Earth* is his first produced screenplay... IVOR MONTAGU is, among many other things, one of the founders of the Film Society... ELLIOT RUBINSTEIN teaches at the City University of New York; he is writing a book on Preston Sturges and did the volume on *The General* for the Indiana University Press *Filmguide* series... ELIZABETH SUSSEX's book *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary* will be published shortly by the University of California Press... JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR is writing a book on Alfred Hitchcock.



# Letters

## Dreyer's Joan

SIR,—In a recent letter (Summer 1975), Mr. Herman G. Weinberg asserts that *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was taken from Dreyer and drastically recut by the producers before the film's world première and that the version which survives is thus a mutilated one.

Although contemporary sources claim that *Jeanne d'Arc* was cut to pacify Parisian church censorship, I know of no evidence that the producers tampered with the film before its world première in Copenhagen. In no published interview did Dreyer make such a claim, nor do the authoritative biographies by Ebbe Neergaard and Carl Vincent (both written with Dreyer's cooperation) indicate any such mutilation. Finally, in response to a 1959 questionnaire asking about difficulties with producers, Dreyer cites producer interference only in the making of *Mikael* and *Two Beings*. However, he recounts that he and the producers of *Jeanne d'Arc* interrogated a preview audience about possibly offensive passages and discovered that if every suggestion were followed, the film would be cut to nothing. 'The managers now knew for certain: the film had to be shown to the public in the form I had given it' (Robert Hughes, ed., *Film: Book 1*, pp. 42-43). At no point does Dreyer suggest that the film was snatched from his hands or cut without his approval. Thus Mr. Weinberg's source contravenes Dreyer's own testimony on this score.

As for the authenticity of our prints of *Jeanne d'Arc*: Dreyer's original negative was long believed lost in the war, but in the late forties a negative was discovered and turned over to the Cinémathèque Française, and this is the most complete copy we have. Is it authentic? I have been able to unearth only one record of the length of the original—Dreyer's own word. In the questionnaire response cited above, he writes that the original was 'only 7,200 feet long', or at silent speed around 108 minutes. (He adds, *contra* Mr. Weinberg's source again, that the producers did not consider the film's length to be a problem.) Now the Cinémathèque Française print runs, at silent speed, about 110 minutes. Though this is certainly not sufficient evidence to settle the matter, *Jeanne d'Arc* may very well have survived intact.

Yours faithfully,  
DAVID BORDWELL  
University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## The Passenger

SIR,—Like the coroner immersed in his task, Richard Roud seems too absorbed in a meticulous thematic analysis of *The Passenger* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1975) to notice the nature of the body of the film itself. He has gone as far as to suggest that the movement of the camera in the final seven minute sequence of the film actually transcribes an omega design (although he has omitted any explanation of its mythological significance), yet persistent prober that he is, was unable to discover, of all things, Daisy.

While it is easy to slap the intellectually chic 'waiting for Godot' label on the character and his significance, it is more difficult to render a reinterpretation of the motif in the form that it takes in this film. Daisy was the man hustled out of the hotel pool area by agents of the African government, and later brutalised in classical kung fu fashion in his interrogation. The mumbled words of the interrogating agent are: 'Est-tu Daisy?'

Yours faithfully,  
GEORGE BURGER  
Montreal, Quebec

SIR,—On reading the article concerning *The Passenger*, I was surprised to discover that so many inaccuracies had gone to print. First, Mr. Roud states that 'Jack Nicholson arrives in a Land Rover, trying to find his way to somewhere or something,' yet it is stated on the tape recording heard while Locke is exchanging the passport photographs, that he is searching for the local guerrillas. Mr. Roud never mentions the small coloured boy who inexplicably enters the Land Rover and gives Nicholson directions. He could equally well be the passenger of the title...

The first shot of Maria Schneider is hardly 'fleeting'; we see her reading, then she yawns and stretches. This seems to me a fairly long introductory shot. At the roadside café, Mr. Roud states, 'Nothing of importance is said.' Nicholson explains to Schneider for the first time what he has done; surely Mr. Roud would agree that this has quite a considerable importance.

His attempted factual description of the ultimate scene is incorrect in many instances. The little boy does not throw a stone at the old man; it is obviously at a passing dog. The air of mystery he ascribes to the two men arriving is inappropriate. We see them quite clearly, they are the men who have been following Robertson/Locke. Previously we have seen them abducting and interrogating the coloured man who first met Robertson/Locke concerning the gun assignment. He totally ignores what we hear on the soundtrack: a door opens, then a muffled noise (a pistol shot?), then a door closing. This is strengthened by the fact that the white man approaches the window but then moves away

again as he hears the door close. This man incidentally is the one who attempts to talk to Schneider—again Mr. Roud chooses to surround a simple occurrence in mystery. At the end, Schneider does not say in reply to Locke's wife's statement 'I do,' but 'I did.' Again the difference of emphasis is surely very important.

Yours faithfully,  
S. L. DOLAN  
London, W.12.

## Almira Sessions

SIR,—In your Winter 1974 issue, under 'Obituary' (p. 27) you list the death of actress Almira Sessions. It is also there stated that she was 'French-born', and her career included 'early Hollywood silents'. The last two statements are incorrect.

Almira Sessions was born in the United States, near Washington, D.C., in either 1888 or 89. Her family were listed in the official Blue-Book and she was a Georgetown debutante. When she went into show business before World War I, she was disowned by her family. At that time show business was not 'proper'. They made up in later years.

I cannot find any evidence that Almira Sessions appeared in films before 1940, about which time Bob Hope brought her to the west coast to appear in his radio show, on which she played the role of Brenda in the *Brenda and Cobina* act. The American Film Institute film catalogue has no listing for her for the years 1921 to 1930. During this time she was appearing in vaudeville, musical

comedy, and on the Broadway stage. If she did make any films prior to coming to Hollywood, they would have been made in New York or on the east coast.

Yours faithfully,  
DONALD DESCHNER  
Hollywood, California  
Mr. Deschner is, of course, quite correct; our apologies for this mistake.—EDITOR

## Horse-Boy

SIR,—I wonder if it would be possible to correct a slight error that appeared in David Robinson's article on Film Schools (Summer, 1975) where he refers to 'Jonathan Lewis' *Horse-Boy*. As I wrote and produced *Horse-Boy* (it was my thesis film), I feel it is only right that the film should be known as Chris Coles' and Jonathan Lewis' *Horse-Boy*.

Yours faithfully,  
CHRISTOPHER COLES  
New York.

## Sight and Sound

Unprecedented increases in printing, paper and postage costs have made an increase in the price of SIGHT AND SOUND unavoidable. With effect from this issue, the subscription rates will be £2.70 for one year and £5 for two years. Single copies will cost 55p from bookshops and newagents, and 68p by post from the British Film Institute, Publications and Membership Services, 81 Dean Street, London W1V 6AA.

In the United States the cost per copy becomes \$2.00.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

COLUMBIA-WARNER for *The Wind and the Lion*.  
CIC for *Nashville, Posse*.  
EMI for *Went the Day Well?*, *Dead of Night*.  
BRITISH LION/DAVIDSON DALLING ASSOCIATES for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.  
ACADEMY/CONNOISSEUR/HUNGAROFILM for *Elektreia*.  
GOLDEN ERA for *Scarlet Street*, *Die 1000 Augen des Dr. Mabuse*.  
PLEASANT PASTURES for *Some Call It Loving*.  
UNIVERSAL PICTURES/CIC for *Family Plot*, photographs of Alfred Hitchcock.  
FANTASY FILMS/UNITED ARTISTS for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.  
MERCHANT-IVORY PRODUCTIONS for *Autobiography of a Princess*.  
SUNCHILD/MONIQUE JAMET for *Les Filles du Feu*.  
MOSFILM for *The Mirror*, *Mayakovsky Laughs*.  
MOSFILM/TOHO for *Dersu Uzala*.  
SOLARIS for *Die falsche Bewegung*.  
SOCIETE NATIONALE DE CINEMATOGRAPHIE/DOMIREY FILM, DAKAR (SENEGAL) for *Xala*.  
CITELFILM (GENEVA)/ACTION FILMS for *Pas si Méchant que ça*.  
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JOHN GRAY for photograph of Fritz Lang.

JOSEPH ZIMBROLT for photograph of Alberto Cavalcanti.  
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NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Coal Face*, *Rien que les Heures*, *Pett and Pott*, *The Lodger*, *Waxworks*, *La Coquille et le Clergyman*, *Entr'acte*, Film Society title card, *Die Nibelungen*, *Spione*, *Steamboat Bill Jr.*, *Happiness*.

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# FILM GUIDE

## \*APPASSIONATA (Eagle)

A promising first film by Gian Luigi Calderone, a former Bertolucci assistant, about a tortured family trio. In spite of the confusing censor cuts and dubbing, a provocative intrigue with some remarkable mad scenes from Valentina Cortese. (Gabriele Ferzetti, Eleanora Giorgi, Ninetto Davoli.)

## \*BITE THE BULLET (Columbia-Warner)

Shaggy-dog Western from Richard Brooks, about a 700-mile horse race held in the halcyon setting of Teddy Roosevelt's America. Mildly appealing, but Brooks dwells too heavily on the making-of-the-Americans theme to give much life to the characters or the action. (Gene Hackman, Candice Bergen, James Coburn, Ben Johnson.)

## BRANNIGAN (United Artists)

More nudging and winking about the John Wayne persona, and a lot of sweating and straining to adapt modern thriller modes to the Duke's venerable charisma. Quaintly old-fashioned and, with as much sightseeing as action in the London locales, clearly packaged for the tourist trade. (Judy Geeson, John Vernon, James Booth; director, Douglas Hickox.)

## DROWNING POOL, THE (Columbia-Warner)

A sluggish thriller that might all be taking place underwater, with the actors drifting through a plethora of unrelated cameos and the last minute revelations looking flatly unconvincing. Ross Macdonald has been unhappily blended with Tennessee Williams for the sake of some atmospheric Southern locations. (Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward, Tony Franciosa; director, Stuart Rosenberg.)

## EARTH IS A SINFUL SONG (Contemporary)

Steamy saga of a misbegotten love, set in the icy wastes of northern Finland. A sort of Lapland *Cold Comfort Farm*, taking in everything from religious hysteria to incest after the sauna, and only partly redeemed by colourful location photography and exuberant performances. (Maritta Viitamäki, Pauli Jauhojärvi; director, Rauni Mollberg.)

## EIGER SANCTION, THE (CIC)

With a plot full of non-sequiturs and daft dollops of action (the Eiger puts in a brief, pointless appearance for some showy stunt work) and a complement of villains who look like TV cast-offs, Clint Eastwood runs this directorial venture aground on some blatantly obvious rocks. (Clint Eastwood, George Kennedy, Vonetta McGee.)

## \*FORTUNE, THE (Columbia-Warner)

After landing in deep water with *The Day of the Dolphin*, Mike Nichols is still floundering with this eccentric coupling of black and crazy comedy. As two ill-assorted and ill-equipped lady-killers, Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty look as out of sorts and out of place as the director. (Stockard Channing.) Reviewed.

## \*\*FRENCH CONNECTION NUMBER 2 (Fox-Rank)

John Frankenheimer returns from the wilderness with this brisk follow-up that pulls no surprises but efficiently delivers the goods. Gene Hackman attempts to make more of Popeye Doyle than the film really offers, but brilliantly seizes his chance in a gruelling scene of 'cold turkey'. (Fernando Rey, Bernard Fresson.)

## \*\*HENNESSY (CIC)

Revenge-crazed Rod Steiger attempts (but fails, alas) to blow up the Houses of Parliament after his wife and child are killed by army bullets in Ireland. Neat, well-characterised thriller, debatably using the current troubles—and the Royal Family—as accessories. (Lee Remick, Richard Johnson; director, Don Sharp.)

## \*\*INFERNAL TRIO, THE (Fox-Rank)

First film by Francis Girod, a bizarre horror comedy with political overtones about an eminently respectable gentleman who joins forces with two sisters to murder for profit and passion. Marred by English dubbing, but the acid bath murder sequence, *Psycho* in mood, remains brilliant. (Michel Piccoli, Romy Schneider, Mascha Gonska.)

## \*JACQUELINE SUSANN'S ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH (CIC)

Entertaining absurdity from the late authoress of high-priced scandals, featuring an ethereal Deborah Raffin, a tough-talking Brenda Vaccaro and a strenuous teeth-clenching Kirk Douglas. Maraschino sets, epic subplots and enough dotry dialogue to furnish a ten-year serial. (Alexis Smith, George Hamilton; director, Guy Green.)

## \*\*LANCELOT OF THE LAKE (Contemporary)

Robert Bresson at the height of his powers in a beautiful retelling of the latter part of the Grail legend. Pared down to essentials of sound and image so that the very rattle of armour helps define the softness of flesh, it is his most apocalyptic film, as well as his most mysterious. (Luc Simon, Laura Duke Condominas, Humbert Balsan.)

## LITTLE PRINCE, THE (CIC)

A heavily over-produced musical that sinks the fragile fantasy of Saint-Exupéry's original under the broad mugging of its guest performers, and some even broader fish-eye distortions. Bob Fosse shines as a lithe and loathsome snake. (Richard Kiley, Steven Warner, Gene Wilder; director, Stanley Donen.)

## MAN WHO LOVED CAT DANCING, THE (CIC)

Flat, rampantly clichéd Western in which a well-bred lady (Sarah Miles) is kidnapped by train robbers, and after token recrimination falls in love with their darkly brooding leader (Burt Reynolds). (Lee J. Cobb, Jack Warden; director, Richard C. Sarafian.)

## \*\*MARJOE (Pleasant Pastures)

*Cinéma-vérité* portrait of a revivalist preacher who, hoping for a career as pop singer and actor, initiated this exposé of his own insincerities. Inconclusive but fascinating, especially the newsreel footage of his hellfire preaching debut at the age of three-and-a-half. (Directors, Howard Smith, Sarah Kernochan.)

## \*\*MERCHANT OF FOUR SEASONS, THE (Cinegate)

Another Fassbinder film about the erosion of promise (made in 1971 and marking a turning point in his career); the bleak but beguiling tale of a little fruit-seller hounded by the women in his life into death through drink. A minutely controlled, uncomfortably reverberating critique of

bourgeois manners. (Hans Hirschmüller, Irm Hermann, Hanna Schygulla.)

## MR. RICCO (CIC)

Uneasy mixture of racial tract and private eye thriller, with Dean Martin lazily solving the mystery as a legal counsellor beset by black clients, Italian in-laws and harassed policemen. Some good wisecracks, otherwise amorphous. (Geraldine Brooks; director, Paul Bogart.)

## \*\*NASHVILLE (CIC)

Robert Altman's epic, which reinvents the country music capital with his own quirky brand of interactions among twenty-four superlative lead players—including songs from almost half of them—around Joan Tewkesbury's blueprint. Marred by an over-determined finale, but studded with a wealth of detail that rewards more than one viewing. (Lily Tomlin, Ronce Blakley, Keith Carradine, Geraldine Chaplin.) Reviewed.

## OUT OF SEASON (EMI)

Familiar sexual hostilities engaged by a triangle (mother, daughter, American visitor) marooned in an off-season English seaside hotel. Sub-Losey (games, fantasies, identity confusions) and all the more predictable for it. (Vanessa Redgrave, Cliff Robertson, Susan George; director, Alan Bridges.)

## \*OVERLORD (EMI)

Mixture of newsreel material and fictional footage depicting the last days of a young English soldier before the Normandy landing. Weighed down by sentimentality in its treatment of the soldier as Everyman, but conscientious in its black-and-white period recreations. (Brian Stirling, Julie Neesam; director, Stuart Cooper.)

## \*\*POSSE (CIC)

Vigorous little fable that turns the tables on the law-and-order bias of most Westerns; Watergate is clearly, but not obtrusively, the basis of its political argument. Kirk Douglas directs efficiently, but allows Bruce Dern to run away too easily with the film. (Bo Hopkins, James Stacy, Luke Askew.) Reviewed.

## REINCARNATION OF PETER PROUD, THE (Fox-Rank/Avco Embassy)

Unimaginably dull little potboiler which does for parapsychology what those 'hip' and 'with it' Hollywood movies of the Sixties did for the youth culture. Risible script and soap-opera direction leave one hankering after *The Exorcist*. (Michael Sarrazin, Jennifer O'Neill, Margot Kidder; director, J. Lee Thompson.)

## \*\*RETURN OF THE PINK PANTHER, THE (United Artists)

Peter Sellers triumphs his earlier incarnations of the hapless Clouseau, and Blake Edwards highlights the fumbling and bumbling by separating it from the rest of the plot. The structure is occasionally a little awkward, but both the chaos and the chases are delivered in sharp, helter-skelter style. (Christopher Plummer, Herbert Lom.)

## \*ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW, THE (Fox-Rank)

Certainly not what it might have been, considering the excitement of the stage original, but probably worth a look for those who missed this horror/rock extravaganza in its natural setting. Tim Curry is still something of a phenomenon as Frank N. Furter, and much of the score remains a delight. (Richard O'Brien, Susan Sarandon; director, Jim Sharman.)

## ROYAL FLASH (Fox-Rank)

A rather sorry venture, in which Malcolm McDowell is hopelessly miscast and Dick Lester turns the cleverly pastiche history of George Macdonald Fraser's *Flashman* books into rough

parody. Drowned in the general air of frenzy, the jokes and the handsome sets get little chance. (Oliver Reed, Alan Bates, Florinda Bolkan.)

## SAFE PLACE, A (Pleasant Pastures)

Impenetrably indulgent mood piece with the resourceful Tuesday Weld as a heroine who clings to memories of childhood happiness. Orson Welles lends a hand as a magician, and Jack Nicholson as an ex-lover, but neither can help make sense of Henry Jaglom's extravagantly pretentious style. (Gwen Welles, Philip Proctor.)

## \*\*SMILE (United Artists)

Michael Ritchie's study of the tribulations of a beauty contest in Santa Rosa, California. Exceptionally zestful and packed with glancing satirical asides; but also a comment on humbugging, publicity-fed values which has more to it than meets the eye. (Bruce Dern, Barbara Feldon, Michael Kidd.) Reviewed.

## \*\*SOME CALL IT LOVING (Pleasant Pastures)

Stunning plunge by Kubrick's former producer into the language, processes and consequences of erotic dreaming. Original, hypnotic and suffused with a lyricism that is enhanced by a haunting musical score, this odd *Sleeping Beauty* fantasy isn't for everyone; see it and decide for yourself. (Zalman King, Tisa Farrow, Richard Pryor; director, James B. Harris.) Reviewed.

## \*\*TWELVE CHAIRS, THE (Seven Keys)

Impressively lavish Mel Brooks' version of the hoary Russian tale, made after *The Producers* on locations in Eastern Europe. Pretty production values, better jokes than *Young Frankenstein*, but never more than the sum of some wildly discordant parts and performances. (Ron Moody, Frank Langella, Mel Brooks.)

## \*WILD PARTY, THE (Seven Keys)

Appearing here in a version recut by the studio, with nearly half an hour missing, James Ivory's depiction of Hollywood decadence in 1929 still has some winning songs by scriptwriter Walter Marks and a lush performance from Raquel Welch. But a sadly miscast James Coco throws the plot out of joint, and the editing tends to follow suit. (Tiffany Bolling, Royal Dano, Perry King.)

## \*\*WIND AND THE LION, THE (Columbia-Warner)

With his delightfully eccentric view of history working full stretch, John Milius turns an international storm in a teacup—Arab bandit kidnaps American lady for ransom—into a brilliantly witty clash of personalities and myths starring Teddy Roosevelt's fantasy America. (Sean Connery, Candice Bergen, Brian Keith, John Huston.) Reviewed.

## \*\*W. W. AND THE DIXIE DANCEKINGS (Fox-Rank)

Likeable if minor saga about a hillbilly con artist taking over a country music group in the Fifties. Despite an uncomfortable stab at rural eccentricity by Art Carney, the actors and Deep South settings brightly conjure up the milieu, and Burt Reynolds is irresistible in the title part. (Conny Van Dyke, Ned Beatty, Furry Lewis; director, John G. Avildsen.)

## YAKUZA, THE (Columbia-Warner)

Paul Schrader's screenplay and Sydney Pollack's direction make turgid work of this meeting of East and West. The charismatic pairing of Robert Mitchum and Takakura Ken is submerged in the endless talk and the dull delivery of even the goriest action. (Brian Keith.)



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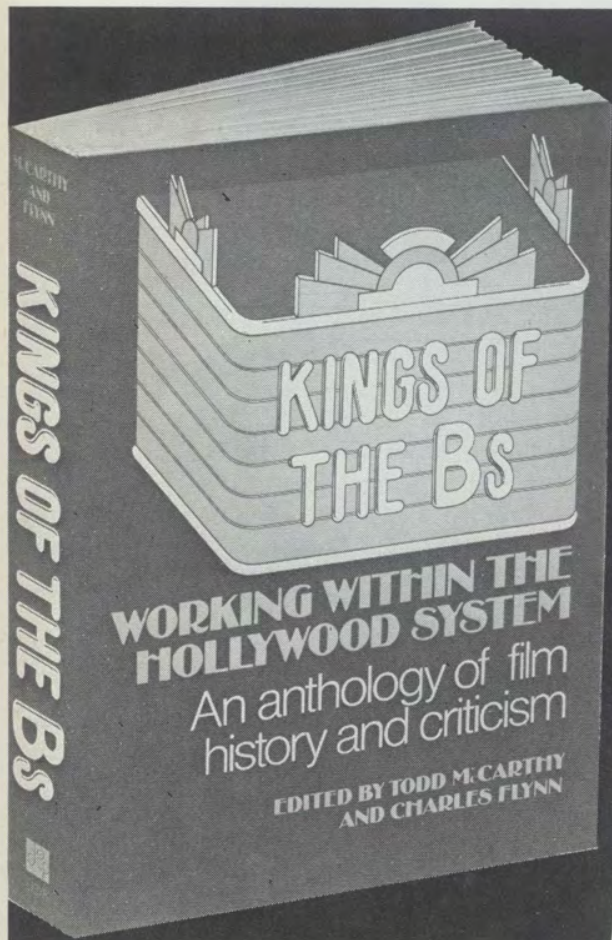
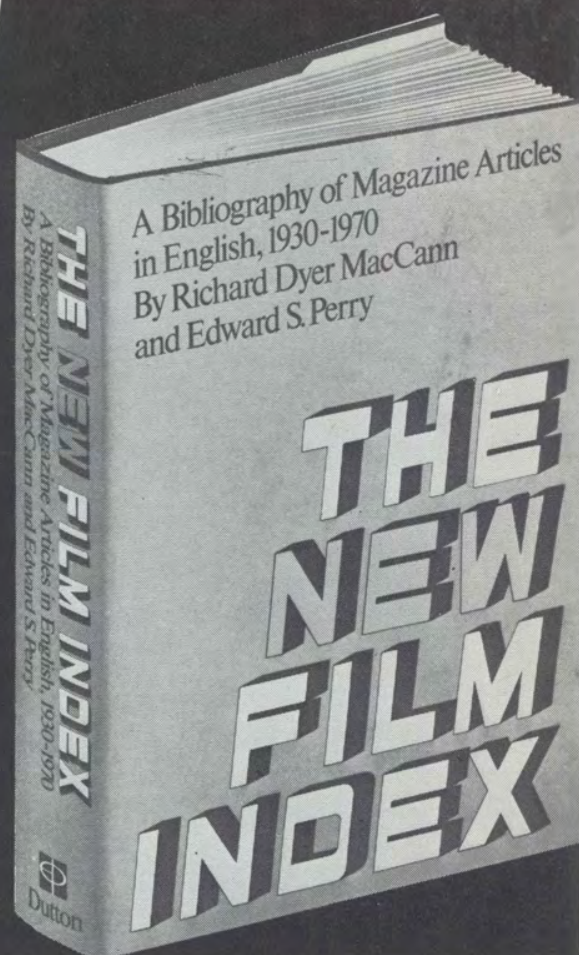
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